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Athersys' stem-cell therapy used at Clinic in 1st clinical trial patient

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Mary Vanac

Plain Dealer Reporter

The adult stem-cell therapy developed by Athersys Inc., a Cleveland biopharmaceutical company, has been used successfully to treat its first clinical trial patient at the Cleveland Clinic.

Athersys is doing a Phase I clinical trial of its MultiStem therapy at several hospitals to evaluate its safety and maximum tolerated dose.

MultiStem, which is derived from adult stem cells rather than embryonic stem cells, could improve the heart function of severe heart attack patients.

Dr. Marc Penn, director of the Clinic's Skirball Laboratory for Cardiovascular Cellular Therapeutics and Center for Cardiovascular Cell Therapy, reported that MultiStem was delivered safely to the first patient in the trial and was tolerated well.

Penn, who also is co-principal investigator for the MultiStem heart trial, presented summary data on the ongoing trial at the annual Transvascular Cardiovascular Therapeutics conference Monday in Washington.

Future clinical trials would gauge the effectiveness of the stem cell therapy in humans. Athersys already has evaluated the safety and ability of MultiStem to improve heart function in several types of animals.

Athersys is running two other clinical trials: One for using MultiStem to treat graft-versus-host disease and one for a drug to treat obesity called ATHX-105.

"Though we have made tremendous progress with our multiple clinical programs, we are still several years away from the market with each of these programs," Athersys President and Chief Operating Officer B.J. Lehmann wrote in an e-mailed response to a reporter's questions.

"Over the next several years, we will continue to engage in clinical studies intended to confirm the safety, tolerability and efficacy of our product candidates," Lehmann said.

Athersys is developing MultiStem for heart attack treatment with Angiotech Pharmaceuticals in Vancouver, British Columbia. Last month, Angiotech announced cost reductions that could reduce its outlays for co-developing this therapy.

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter:

mvanac@plaind.com, 216-999-5302

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