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## Doctor plans trip overseas to see stem cell treatments



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A local doctor hopes to travel overseas to get a closer look at medical advances with umbilical stem cell research.

Ophthalmologist David Klein has been invited to China as part of a fact-finding mission at one of the top facilities in the world.

Klein realizes good medicine doesn't end at the U.S. border.

However, there's a stigma associated with procedures still foreign to this country.

"A lot of Americans assume if it's being done overseas, they're experimenting on human beings," Klein said. "I'm going into it with an open mind."

The trip tentatively is set for early 2009.

Klein currently treats several patients who have undergone stem cell infusion in China. He became interested in learning more after seeing the progress of Cameron Petersen, the 2-year-old Port Charlotte toddler who underwent treatment last year.

Cameron suffers from optic nerve hypoplasia, a leading cause of blindness in children. The condition causes underdevelopment of the optic nerve and can lead to permanent blindness.

American doctors told Cameron's parents nothing could be done.

The family researched other options and found Stem Cells China, a research facility that has infused umbilical cord stem cells into patients with varying disabilities.

Cameron traveled overseas in August 2007 as part of a case study to treat his blindness.

The procedure consisted of four stem-cell infusions to Cameron's arm and the lumbar region of his spine.

By the third treatment, Cameron was standing on his own and crawling toward objects — simple tasks he couldn't do before. Now, family members say he can see at least 10 feet, and is attending school.

"Cameron has made huge improvements," said Carol Petersen, the boy's grandmother. "There was nothing for Cameron before this treatment. Now, his world is limitless."

At this point, Klein is "cautiously optimistic" about the effectiveness of umbilical stem cells.

"I want to make sure there's good science behind it," he said.

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