

OMAHA, Neb. -- A Falls City, Neb., couple recently traveled to China in September to get their son an experimental treatment not available in the U.S.

Amanda and Robbie Sipple's son, Kasen, was born blind and autistic. His daily life is dominated by anger and isolation. His parents said they would do anything to improve his conditions. They heard about a treatment performed by Chinese doctors that hasn't been approved for human testing in the U.S.

The treatment is a stem-cell procedure designed to nourish and replenish undeveloped neurons in Kasen's brain with blood taken from an umbilical cord.

Dr. Iqbal Ahmad, a stem cell researcher with the University of Nebraska Medical Center, said the procedure is unproven and could be dangerous because it lacks scientific oversight.

"If infection takes place it can lead to inflammation of the brain and it can cause further injury," Ahmad said.

And Ahmad said no valid evidence exists that would suggest the procedure could develop neurons Kasen needs to heal his optic nerves.

Despite that, the Sipples left for China on Sept. 28, a day before Kasen's sixth birthday.

After \$26,000, several intravenous treatments into his spine and no guarantee that the procedure would work, the Sipples started to notice a few differences.

By treatment No. 3, Amanda said she noticed that her son seemed to be tracking the movement of a light on a remote. She also said she noticed a difference in her son's autistic behavior and his eating patterns.

She called it "awesome." Ahmad called it questionable.

"Is this happening due to the normal maturation of the brain? We do not know. Or is it because of the treatment that has taken place? We do not know," Ahmad said.

Kasen's prognosis is unclear. Chinese doctors said the stem cells will need a chance to mature for a month or two before results can be measured.

But the Sipples are convinced a five-week trip to Quang Dow, China, has produced real results.

"I know every developmental stage he's hit in the last six years, and we have never seen improvements like we saw in the 30 days we were there," Amanda said.

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