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Arabian horse studies may aid 'bubble babies'

SEATTLE (AP) — Experiments with Arabian horses may provide a breakthrough in treating babies who lack immune systems. Scientists say children are born with a rare genetic defect called severe combined immunodeficiency disease — SCID. Affected youngsters rarely live longer than a year unless they are confined to germ-free plastic bubbles or get bone-marrow transplants from genetically compatible siblings.

In Arabian horses, researchers at WSU found a genetic match for children afflicted by SCID. About 1 percent of Arabian foals are born without immunity.

Tilman Tims, a WSU researcher in veterinary microbiology and pathology, discovered recently that the reason Arabian foals lack the immune system is because of a genetic lack of the right type of interferon.

The question is whether the horses lack the gene that regulates interferon production or they have the gene but it isn't working correctly, he said.

He expects to have an answer within three months.

"If it isn't there, that's a simple problem," he said. But if the gene is present but isn't working, "there could be several reasons why — a major problem that would take a long time."

Interferon is a general virus and bacteria fighter that recently has been produced experimentally for treating other diseases.

His investigation of how to solve the problems in horses could eventually lead to alternative based treatment for SCID children.

Meanwhile, Harvard University researchers think another genetic engineering technique may help SCID children.

The technique uses monoclonal antibodies which, like interferon, are only given in a laboratory.

Unlike interferon, monoclonal antibodies target a specific disease. In the Harvard experiments, the antibodies are used on bone marrow for transplants.

Hans Oishi, a University of Washington researcher of pediatrics and immunology, estimates that one or two SCID babies are diagnosed in the state each year — although others may die of infections without being diagnosed as having SCID.

Oishi says he is more encouraged by the Harvard experiment than by WSU's. The potential for bone-marrow transplants, he says, is more promising than interferon treatments because the disease is more complex in people than in horses.

Both experiments may just indicate a way closer to a cure for cancer.

Some scientists believe the cause of cancer is genetic, even in cancers brought on by such hazards as cigarette smoking and asbestos fibers. Cancer is the rapid growth of certain cells, and growth is controlled by the genes. Much cancer research now is aimed at finding a way to change genes that aren't working.

That's the connection to interferon. Among its other uses, interferon can keep cells from dividing.

Murders on fishing boat still probed by police

SEATTLE (AP) — After nearly three months, the police who killed up to seven people aboard the fishing boat Inverness are still at large.

But officials say they haven't given up the search.

"The investigation is out of the headline category, but we're working just as hard," said Alaska State Trooper Capt. Mike Kullivier, in Juneau.

"This is still a full-blown investigation, but there's nothing new."

Troopers spent last week in Beaufort and Blaine talking to family members, viewing pictures of the Whistler County-based sailor and trying to piece together a history of a questionnaire and sketches of a possible suspect have been sent to all fisheries licensed in Alaska, and a reward fund in Blaine has grown to \$10,000.

On Sept. 7 the Inverness, anchored in a cove near the Southeast Alaska village of Craig, erupted in flames and burned to the waterline.

Witnesses reported seeing a slight man with a scarred face leaving the

burning boat in a skiff. The man vanished after beaching the skiff in Craig, Troopers speculate he probably fled to Washington.

Authorities recovered the bodies of Blaine residents Mark Coulbourn — who owned the boat — his wife, Irene, their 5-year-old daughter, Kimberly, and cousin, Michael Stewart. The couple were shot.

Officials could not find the remains of the Coulbourns' 6-year-old son, John. They say the heat of the fire may have consumed him.

Authorities have also been unable to identify remains of Jerome Revere and Ivan Klose, of Blaine, or Chris Meyman, of San Rafael, Calif., the other crew members.

Alaska troopers say at least seven people died aboard the Inverness, leaving open the possibility one crew member was responsible for the killings.

"We're now looking at the possibility that one of the guys had identified someone, causing the guy to go off the deep end," said Kullivier.

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Rival bidder questions award for lottery tickets

SEATTLE (AP) — An unsuccessful bidder for the job of printing Washington's lottery tickets says the contract was awarded on the basis of "questionable" judgments and "distortions."

David König, director of product planning and development for Webster Games Inc., said in a letter to the state lottery agency that Webster's bid was "at least \$400,000 less" than the bid from Scientific Games Inc., which won the \$1.3 million contract for 180 million tickets.

König also wrote that Webster's tickets were judged to be more secure than those of Scientific Games, and that the state's review of evaluating bidders "needs to be improved."

"I've read and heard a lot of things about Webster's bid," said John A. Fisher, of North Brunswick, N.J., and Scientific Games' vice president, who was vying for the contract to produce the second round of instant lottery tickets for the state.

The \$1.3 million contract for the state's first lottery game, now under way, was awarded to Scientific Games without a bidding process.

Lottery officials said they didn't have time to solicit bids for the first game tickets.

The lottery agency released König's letter Thursday but declined to respond. The agency will respond in writing next week, said Bruce Stoney, assistant director for operations and the agency's contract administrator.

König's letter did not name the firm's competing bid figures. Stoney said earlier in the week that the contract was "upgraded" downward to about \$1.3 million after the agency determined Scientific Games' overall bid was best.

Stoney and Webster's bid was about \$1.3 million.

König said in his letter that negotiating prices after a bid is selected is not standard. He also said that although bid evaluations were not supposed to know the bidders' names, they did see Scientific Games' bid.

He also said one evaluator "apparently" went back to his own sheets and lowered two scores for Scientific Games.

König said the agency would not identify the evaluator.

Stoney said earlier in the week the company's proposals were "pretty close." Scientific Games will be said because it offered better technical and professional support assistance to the agency.

"Cost was considered, but it didn't bid the greatest weight," he said.

In the instant lottery games, players buy \$1 tickets and scratch off a latex covering to search for matching money amounts. If three are found, the player wins that amount of money.

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