

Technique use on Max may Impact millions

By Ruth Gesmer Silverman Daily Herald Correspondent

Posted 10/22/2004

What doctors learned from Max Randell, 7, of Buffalo Grove will have an impact on several neurological diseases, including epilepsy, Parkinson's and some types of brain tumors and spinal disorders.

At the recent fund-raising dinner for Canavan Research Illinois, the recipient of the group's Physician Scientist of the Year Award was Dr. Andrew Freese, professor and vice chairman of the Department of Neurosurgery and director of spinal surgery at the University of Minnesota.

In the three years since the implant, Freese says Max has made progress.

"It appears he is no longer deteriorating and is actually gaining ground," he said. "But, the earlier we intervene the better."

That may 90 as early as the womb,

Using prenatal tests, "we will look fora defective gene that doesn't make protein properly," he says. "We are confident that if the same procedure is used in utero - before a baby is born - there will be an even better opportunity for improvement. ... We have plans to test it in utero in the next several months, in animals."

The impact of the research may reach beyond Canavan disease

"The research and techniques will have a major impact on the lives of millions of people," Freese said at the fund-raising dinner.

He hopes the technique might eventually also impact on certain types of strokes and on Alzheimer's disease, when scientists know more about the causes.

Ilyce Randell said she will continue to fund Freese's research with Dr. Paola Leone, a scientist at Cooper Hospital, part of Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, in New Jersey, who isolated the gene so that Freese could implant it. Randell expects to give them \$100,000 by the end of this year.

To reach Canavan Research Illinois, call (800) 833-2194 or visit www.canavanresearch.org.