Scientists Will Bring Human-Animal Embryos to term in World's First Experiment

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According to Japanese stem cell biologist Hiromitsu Nakauchi, he's been waiting on this moment for more than 10 years.

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After several years of planning, the researcher has received a governmental approval to pursue one of the most controversial projects out there, i.e. human-animal embryo experiments.

Namely, for many countries in the world, these ethically-fraught types of practices are defunded, banned or restricted. On the other hand, Japan has recently removed the ban on this practice.

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They made it legal to transplant hybrid embryos into surrogate animals and bring them to term.

Nakauchi is the head stem cell researcher from the Tokyo University and Stanford University and he's gone from country to country trying to find support for growing human organs in animals like pigs or sheep.

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Despite the Ethics Obstacle, Nakauchi Hopes He'll Save Lives

With more than 116,000 individuals on the transplant list in the US solely, Nakauchi hopes his research will become live-transforming.

The goal is still far away; however, the next step has been authorised by the official ministries in Japan.

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He is the first research to get approval by the government as of 2014 so he plans to take things slowly to make sure the public is well-informed and understands the process fully.

He stated that he and his team don't expect to be able to create human organs right away, however, this is a pivotal step in moving their research forward based on the knowledge they've collected until now.

What Will the Experiment Be Consisted of?

The beginning of the experiment will be an injection of human induced pluripotent stem cell into mice and rat embryos, all of which have been genetically-modified to be unable to make pancreases.

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The goal is for the embryo to use the cells to build itself a pancreas. The plan is to watch the rodents grow and develop for a period of two years and also monitor their organs and brains.

If this one proves to be successful and promising, the next step is to ask for approval to do the same with pigs.

Human-animal embryos aren't unknown in the scientific world-in the past, there were pig-human embryos and sheep ones too.

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However, they've never been brought to term.

One of the major fears with this research is about the exact place where the human stem cells go in the animal and what they could turn into after being injected.

Nakauchi and his Stanford colleagues made the first successful human-sheep embryo and even though it was destroyed after 28 days only, the hybrid had no organs and only a couple of human cells.

Sources:

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