**New Type of Defibrillator**

A new type of implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD) that also has the ability to deliver cardiac resynchronization therapy (CRT) was recently approved by the FDA. The device, called Contak CD CRT-D, can be used to treat symptoms of advanced heart failure in certain people who already need an ICD.

The Contak system is intended to treat people who already need an implantable defibrillator, whose heart timing is off and who, despite taking heart failure medication, have symptoms of advanced heart failure, such as fatigue, shortness of breath, and difficulty performing daily activities.

The defibrillator component of the product detects and treats life-threatening heart rhythms. The CRT component coordinates the beating of the left and right ventricles of the heart so that they work together more effectively to pump blood throughout the body.

The FDA based its approval on the results of two multicenter clinical studies conducted in the United States by the device's manufacturer, Guidant Corp. of Indianapolis. In the study, 851 people received the Contak system; in the second study, 127 people received it. In half the people, only the defibrillator component was turned on; in the other half, both the defibrillator and the CRT components were turned on. Both groups were studied for six months.

The studies showed that the Contak system is safe and that it effectively coordinates the beating of the heart’s ventricles, resulting in an improvement in some of the symptoms of heart failure. People in whom both components were turned on had a better quality of life and improved exercise capacity than those in whom just the defibrillator was turned on. The studies did not show whether or not the device ultimately affected patient survival.

The FDA is requiring Guidant to conduct a postmarketing study of 1,000 people over three years to determine the product’s safety and effectiveness.

**First Synthetic Secretin**

The FDA has approved SecreFlo (secretin) for injection to help confirm the diagnosis of pancreatic dysfunction and the presence of a pancreatic tumor (gastrinoma) that may be cancerous. SecreFlo is a synthetic formulation of the naturally occurring porcine hormone secretin.

Patients with pancreatic dysfunction are unable to digest food properly. Thick mucus obstructs the pancreas and prevents essential enzymes from breaking down food. Left untreated, this condition can cause patients to become severely malnourished and dehydrated.

SecreFlo helps confirm the diagnosis of pancreatic dysfunction by stimulating the pancreas to secrete pancreatic juice and bicarbonate, which is used to measure the functioning of the pancreas. SecreFlo helps confirm the presence of a pancreatic tumor by stimulating the stomach to release a hormone called gastrin, which is further tested to confirm the diagnosis.

ChiRhoClin, Inc. of Silver Spring, Md., is the sponsor of SecreFlo. The product is manufactured by Chesapeake Biological Laboratories of Baltimore for Repligen Corporation of Needham, Mass.

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**RESEARCH NOTEBOOK**

**First Vaccine for Cat AIDS Approved for Veterinary Use**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has approved the first vaccine for feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) for commercial production and veterinary use.

The patented vaccine for this disease, which is a cat form of AIDS, has been licensed for manufacture by Fort Dodge Animal Health of Overland Park, Kan., a division of Wyeth. Patents for the vaccine are held by the University of California and the University of Florida.

The vaccine, approved in March, should soon be available to veterinarians. "This vaccine offers the first effective protection for cats against this often fatal disease," says Niels Pedersen, D.V.M., Ph.D., director of the Center for Companion Animal Health at the University of California, Davis and an international authority on retroviruses and immunologic disorders of small animals. "The success of the FIV vaccine also offers hope that eventually a vaccine will be developed that will effectively protect against AIDS in humans."

Pedersen and immunologist Janet K. Yamamoto, Ph.D., now a professor in the University of Florida’s College of Veterinary Medicine, first isolated FIV in 1986. Yamamoto has worked with researchers at Fort Dodge Animal Health for more than a decade to develop the vaccine.

FIV is transmitted from cat to cat mainly through bite wounds because the virus is present at high levels in the saliva. Like human AIDS, the virus attacks the body’s immune system, making the animal susceptible to diseases and infections that usually would have little effect on an FIV-free animal.

Cats infected with FIV may remain healthy for five to 10 years before symptoms such as diarrhea, weight loss, fever, swollen lymph nodes and chronic infections appear. Although infected cats may recover from their initial illness, they become lifelong carriers of the virus.