

Scientists: Stem cells can make blind see

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British researchers hope to make stem-cell treatment of blindness caused by macular degeneration routine within a decade.

Macular degeneration is the most common cause of blindness in older people and is believed to affect about 30 percent of 75-year-olds.

Lyndon da Cruz of the University College London Institute of Ophthalmology has had some success transplanting retinal pigment epithelium cells within patients' eyes. Now Cruz and his colleagues hope to use cells grown in a petri dish.

The project received an \$8 million gift from an anonymous U.S. donor whose father became blind.

"This is totally geared toward getting in the clinic," said Pete Coffey, a colleague of Cruz' at the institute. "Our goal within the five-year period is to have a cohort of 10 or 12 patients we can treat. If it hasn't become routine in about 10 years it would mean we haven't succeeded. It has to be something that's available to large numbers of people."

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