

Researchers test old drug with new hopes for pre-eclampsia cure

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Researchers at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston are trying to determine whether a drug already available to heart patients can also be used to delay delivery in expectant mothers with severe preeclampsia. If so, this groundbreaking study would give hope to hundreds of thousands of women who experience this life-threatening disorder each year.

The drug, Digibind, has been prescribed for over 20 years to patients who overdose on a certain heart medication, but is not yet approved for preeclampsia, the most common and dangerous pregnancy complication affecting as many as eight in every 100 pregnant women. The disorder is characterized by high blood pressure, protein in the urine and multi-organ dysfunction, all of which can seriously harm both mother and fetus.

“Preeclampsia is the No. 1 killer of pregnant women in the world, and there is no cure except delivery,” said Dr. George Saade, chief of maternal–fetal medicine at UTMB. “When it is severe and occurs early in the pregnancy, delivery in order to protect the mother results in a premature baby. That’s why this study is important, because if the medication works, then we can protect the mom while allowing the baby to grow and develop without delivering early.”

The clinical trial will test whether Digibind reverses or prevents the abnormalities that occur with preeclampsia and allows the fetus to remain in the womb longer. This would give doctors more time to

administer steroids to prevent respiratory complications in premature births and reduce the need for costly and lengthy neonatal intensive care.

“Right now, there is no treatment for preeclampsia, so this is truly groundbreaking,” said Dr. Nicole Ruddock, the study’s principal investigator and an instructor in UTMB’s Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

Source: University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston

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