Ohio State’s Center for Regenerative Medicine to explore repair of organs, limbs

Business First by Carrie Ghose, Staff reporter

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It’s a good thing William Shatner was in town over the weekend, because Ohio State University’s Wexner Medical Center is about to unleash some healing science worthy of Star Trek.

The school announced Monday it has created a Center for Regenerative Medicine and Cell-Based Therapies, which will apply for newly created grants from the National Institutes of Health. The center’s website says it will investigate “revolutionary” treatments using a patient’s stem cells to grow new organs and tissues, techniques currently limited for use in tissues such as skin and bone. It could help prevent limb loss from chronic wounds in diabetes patients, for example.

The center will unite researchers from Columbus-based research nonprofit Battelle, Nationwide Children’s Hospital and several of Ohio State’s colleges, including medicine, nursing, dentistry, pharmacy, veterinary medicine, engineering and arts and sciences.

It will be located in the recently completed three final floors of the Biomedical Research Tower. The floors had been left as empty space when the tower opened in 2006 until trustees approved $30 million for construction in 2009.

The creation of the center raises interesting questions about the unending tension between amazing technological advances to extend and improve lives and the continued ballooning of the cost of medical care. Will it be less costly in the long run to grow a new liver, compared with the costs and risks of organ transplant and a lifetime of anti-rejection therapy?
The center’s website hints that regenerative medicine is attracting the business interest: “Recognizing the potential financial returns, private industry may represent the most significant portion of this growing field. At this point, research and development represents the most activity in this sector. However, the field does possess opportunities for immediate product development.”

Center Director Dr. Chandan Sen, associate dean for translational and applied research in the medical school, was traveling Monday and several other leaders of the initiative were in surgery and not available for comment. Brent Toto is administrative director.

Carrie Ghose covers health care and medicine, higher education, technology and business services for Business First.