



# Cancer offers clue to immortality

BRISBANE

Scientists believe they may be able to increase people's lifespans significantly by learning why cancer cells are immortal.

Brian Morris, a professor of molecular medical sciences at the University of Sydney, said cultures of cancer cells in laboratories across the world had been kept alive for decades.

"They never die. They'll go on forever," he said.

"Cancer cells survive at the expense of every other cell in the body. The cancer cells take all the nutrients and the rest of the body

goes through organ failure and death."

Professor Morris said a molecule in cancer cells called telomerase which prevented the degradation of telomeres — or protective caps at the end of chromosomes — was believed responsible for keeping the cells alive.

"Some people suggest that by over-expressing telomerase in all cells in the body, maybe we could make humans . . . immortal," he said. "If it can be applied in a totally regulated, controlled manner to all cells of the body, we could massively extend the human lifespan.

"That's very simplistic. Obviously there's going to be a lot more to it than that, but it's a good theoretical start."

Professor Morris will address the three-day International Conference on Healthy Ageing and Longevity in Brisbane which began yesterday.

He said scientists were starting to find variations in genes among people who live to 100.

A variation in the microsomal triglyceride transfer protein (MTP) gene has been frequently found in centenarians. Garlic had also been shown to suppress MTP.

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