

New Harvard center to study legal aspects of biotechnology

Funded by \$10m private donation

By Marcella Bombardieri
GLOBE STAFF

In a sign of the increasing impact of biotechnology on society, Harvard Law School yesterday launched a new center that will grapple with the legal aspects of biotechnology and health policy.

The center will be funded by a \$10 million gift from the Carroll and Milton Petrie Foundation and Joseph H. Flom, a 1948 Harvard Law School graduate and partner with Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagh-

er & Flom LLP in New York.

To be called the Petrie-Flom Center for Health Law Policy, Biotechnology and Bioethics, the new program will touch on controversial subjects ranging from the definition of human life to the cost and quality of healthcare.

For example, said professor Einer R. Elhauge, the faculty director of the new center, one question with legal and ethical ramifications would be if people have the right to modify the genes of their offspring. Conversely, do they have the duty to do so if it will prevent certain diseases?

Such a center will have a big

impact, said Arthur Caplan, director of the Center for Bioethics at the University of Pennsylvania. Caplan said a few law schools, including Boston University, have good programs in health law, and Penn has a lot of students who combine a law degree with a master's in bioethics.

But he was not aware of a law school with a biotechnology program.

"Having a Harvard program is a wonderful boost to getting people involved" in the topic, Caplan said, adding that the new law school Drexel University in Philadelphia is establishing will also

have a healthcare focus. "There is clearly something in the air."

Elhauge said that only a tiny percentage of professors in top law schools study healthcare, even though it consumes 15 percent of the gross domestic product.

Initially, the center will rely on existing Harvard professors — five from Harvard Law School and Michael J. Sandel, a professor of government at Harvard, who al-

so heads a program in ethics and public policy at the Harvard Stem Cell Institute. Elhauge said he hopes the law school will hire more professors who specialize in the topic.

The center will fund large-scale research projects, hold conferences, and fund a fellowship program modeled on Harvard's prestigious Society of Fel-

lows. Fellows would be paid \$60,000 a year for two years and

be free from any teaching obligations. The program is designed "to be the crucible for the next generation of young scholars in this area," he said.

Flom and the Petrie Foundation, where he serves on the board, approached Harvard about the idea last year. Flom said the center will bring sound ideas to very emotional and political topics.

"The object is to stir up intellectual controversy, not diatribes on either side," he said.

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Center donor

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