New Harvard center to study legal aspects of biotechnology

Funded by $10m private donation

By Marcella Bombardieri

In a sign of the increasing imp-act 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 Carrell and Milton Pitco Foundation and Joseph H. Flom, a 1949 Harvard Law School graduate and partner with Skadden, Als, Nasi, Mohler & Flom LLP in New York. To be called the Pitco-Flom Center for Health Law Policy, Biotechnology and Biotech, the new program will touch on controver-sial subjects ranging from the defini-tion of human life to the cost and quality of healthcare.

For example, said professor Eliezer E. Elefant, the faculty di-rector of the new center, one ques-tion will be, "Assuming that only 10 percent of the general public would approve of a law that requires non-paternity testing, what is the cost of the law?"

But he was not aware of a law school with a biotechnology pro-gram. "Having a Harvard program is a wonderful boost to getting peo-ple involved," he said.

"The object is to stir up intellectual controversy, not to distribute on either side," said the center's director, Jon F. Pitts, director of the Center for Health Law Policy, Biotechnology and Biotech.

"There is a great deal of misunderstanding about the law and the facts," he said. "The center will fund large-scale re-search projects, hold conferences, and fund a fellowship program modeled on Harvard's pre-eminence in the field.

"Fellows would be paid $60,000 a year for two years and be free from any teaching obliga-tions. The program is designed to be the crucible for the next generation of young scholars in this area," he said.

"The center will bring together the best minds in the field to explore the ethical, legal, and moral implications of biotechnology. The center will provide a forum for open discussion and debate on these issues."