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## **Domenici pushes for neurological research funding**

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Sen. Pete Domenici has long been an advocate for mental health, and the Mind Research Network considers him a pioneer for its cause.

"We wouldn't be here if it weren't for Pete," laboratory manager Marilee Morgan said.

Domenici and a few researchers from Los Alamos National Labs founded the MRN a decade ago.

The MRN focuses on the advancement of clinical studies in the areas of mental illness and brain disorders by using neuroimaging, genetics and bioinformatics to discover ways to prevent, diagnose and treat neurological illnesses.

Domenici, who will not seek re-election this year, said the progress of the MRN has been phenomenal. "This year is a really important year for the Senate because they are moving ahead in some very new areas, and now is the time to make sure we get all the funding we can to make the institute stronger and more diverse," Domenici said.

In March, the MRN opened a neurogenetics laboratory, which studies the human genome.

Morgan said the advanced technology allows researchers to look into genetic variances across the human genome.



Media Credit: Gabbi Campos / Daily Lobo  
Melynda Byers processes DNA as part of a study at the Mind Research Network's new neurogenetics lab.

Continued.

The goal is to discover which genetic variants are associated with certain diseases, she said.

Kent Hutchison, a researcher at the MRN, said the cooperation of the NGL and the MRN is crucial to the development of genetic understanding and the relationship between a disease and the impact it has on the brain.

"It's been an explosion in the terms of technology and what we can do with it," Hutchison said.

Because technology is rapidly advancing, doctors will soon know a lot more about how to treat certain diseases based on genetic profiles, Hutchison said.

Domenici has been diagnosed with an incurable brain disease: frontotemporal lobar degeneration. After a medical exam in September 2007 found the disease was progressing, he announced he would not seek another term.

Domenici said he is looking forward to the advances at the MRN because his daughter has a mental illness that has not yet been diagnosed.

"I can't predict the future on my end, but the reason we're trying to get some (funding) in there is to take care of the eventualities of it being a little bit different up here (in Washington) without me on this issue," Domenici said.

Dolores Gonzales, MRN's director of external affairs, said the new neurogenetics lab fits Domenici's original objectives for the MRN.

"It was Sen. Domenici's mission to have a top notch, state-of-the-art neuroimaging facility in New Mexico, and we are doing our best to ensure that his vision continues," Gonzales said.

Morgan said she hopes that despite Domenici's departure, New Mexico legislators will continue to help fund this type of research.

Domenici said he hopes other members of the delegation will continue to get involved and take a leadership role, keeping New Mexico in the forefront of legislative issues.

Domenici said he has been working with Sen. Ted Kennedy on one of his last efforts - the Parity of Treatment Act.

Domenici said insurance companies currently provide less coverage to a mentally ill person than they would to a person with cancer, diabetes or heart disease, and the Act would make that illegal.

Domenici said that though time is limited, he looks forward to seeing the bill pass before Congress is dismissed.

"It's going to happen," he said. "We're going to get the big parity, which will be a historic event. I'm pretty happy, and I'm pretty certain that we're going to get it funded."