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## Doctors transplant human uterus

LONDON (AP) — Doctors in Saudi Arabia have performed the first human uterus transplant, which produced two menstrual periods before it failed and had to be removed.

The experiment indicated a womb transplant is technically achievable, but experts say it is highly risky and ethically questionable. Some say it will not be practical until less toxic anti-rejection drugs become available.

The idea of uterus transplants was first explored in the 1950s. But after 20 years of failed experiments on dogs and baboons, many scientists considered it impossible because of the complex blood vessels that must be connected and because of fears that anti-rejection drugs could harm a fetus.

Dr. Wafa Fageeh, a professor at Abdulaziz University who performed the transplant with her team at King Fahad Hospital and Research Center in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, called the operation "a good start."

"It is technically feasible, theoretically desirable, but presently unsafe," said Roger Gosden, a fertility pioneer at Eastern Virginia Medical School in Norfolk, Va. "Their results reveal the risks and this procedure awaits the development of safe immunosuppression.

"A transplant to save life is an acceptable risk, but not one for fertility, when there are alternatives," he said. "This is why we would never be given ethical clearance to try this in the United States" for the foreseeable future.

The operation, reported this week in the International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics, failed because a blood vessel

supplying the uterus developed a clot, which cut off the blood supply.

"You have to give them credit. They took a concept that everybody thought was undoable and they did it," said Dr. Louis Keith, an obstetrician and gynecologist at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago who was not involved in the research.

"It brought enough blood to the uterus for the uterus to survive 99 days and a uterus is supposed to function to menstruate," said Keith, who is editor of the journal that published the report.

The transplant, using the uterus of a 26-year-old post-menopausal woman who had lost her uterus after a hysterectomy, was performed on April 6, 2000, on a 26-year-old woman who had lost her uterus after a hysterectomy because of excessive bleeding after childbirth.

The recipient was given anti-rejection pills, but nine days after the transplant, her body rejected the womb. However, she was able to control it with drugs.

Hormone treatment was given to thicken the womb's lining and it grew to 1.5 centimeters thick, indicating that she was getting through and that the pregnancy was good, the researchers reported.

Menstrual periods happened twice during the pregnancy, but a fertilized egg but sheds because the pregnancy has not occurred.

The hormone treatment was stopped for 21 days, then stopped for a week and being restarted.

"She had two menstrual periods during the hormones each time," he said.

*"They took a concept that everyone thought was undoable and they did it."*

— Dr. Louis Keith  
obstetrician

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### George Washington letter found in N.Y.

ORANGE, Va. (AP) — A letter written by George Washington in 1788 and stolen from a home in Virginia has been found in New York City.

The letter, valued at \$500,000, had been sold to a collector in New York for far less than its value, authorities said Tuesday. It was to be retrieved Thursday by Orange County sheriff's officials.

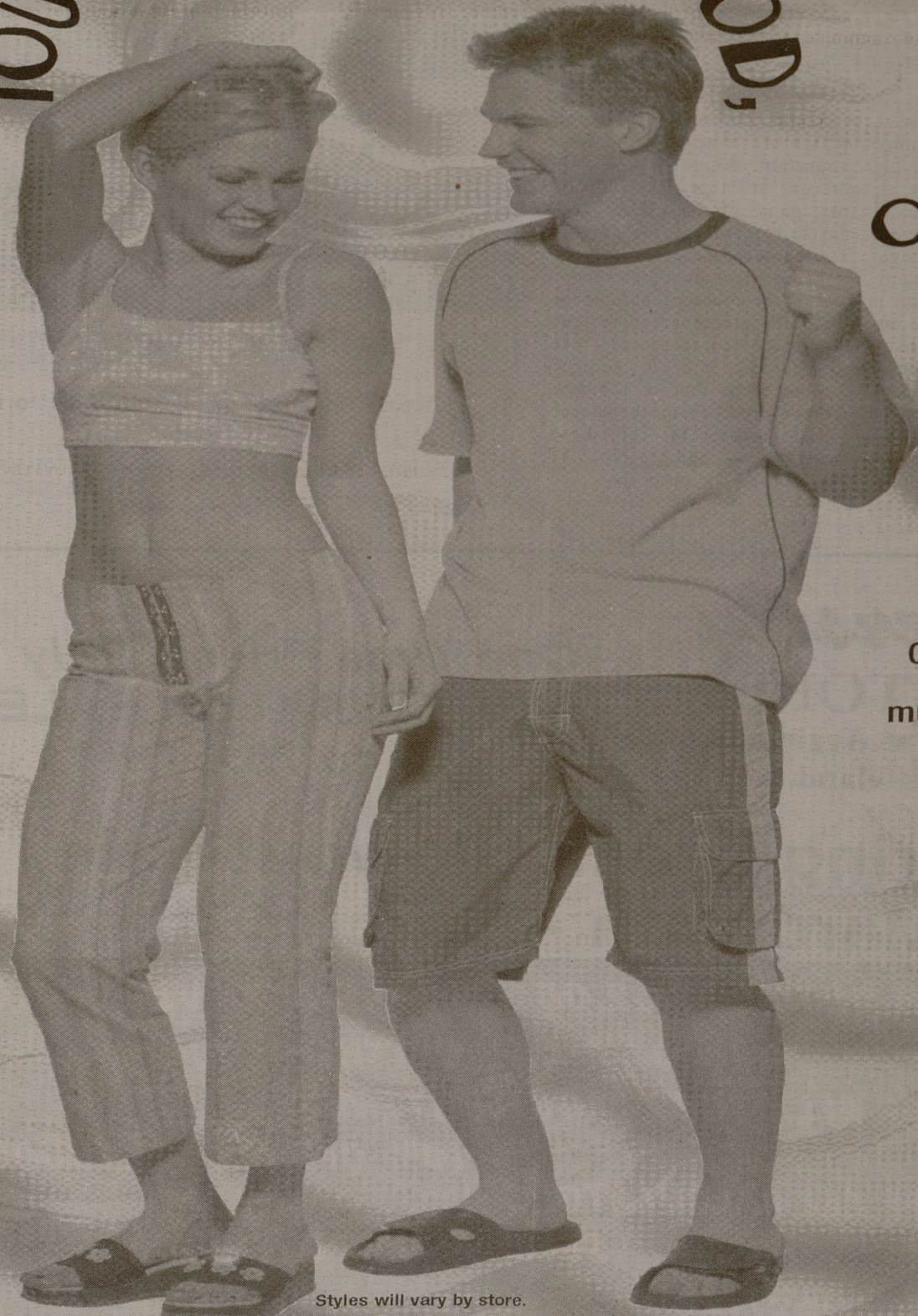
Thomas Paytes, 35, of Orange County, was charged with

grand larceny in the Feb. 25 theft. Paytes worked for the sheriff's office and had access to his home, the sheriff's office said. He was arrested in Washington during the search.

Orange County Sheriff C.G. Feldman would not identify the letter's owner.

The letter was written to Washington's personal secretary, Tobias Lear, nine months before Washington became president. In it, Washington discusses Virginia's ratification of the Constitution, which had taken place three days earlier.

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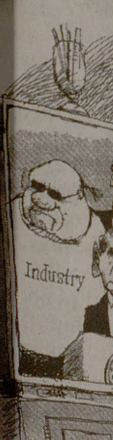
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