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## Doctors say drug no cure

### But scarce Retrovir does help AIDS patients

By Chris Norred  
Of the Emerald

Area doctors are emphasizing that the drug Retrovir is only a treatment and not a cure for people suffering from Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

The drug, formerly known as AZT, recently was approved by the Food and Drug Administration. Studies have shown that treatment with the drug can effectively prolong the lives of AIDS patients.

Doctors in the state who have been prescribing the drug as treatment for AIDS patients since it was released say it's far from perfect, but it's the only thing they have.

The supply of the drug is limited and an extensive series of hoops must be passed through to obtain the drug, said Dale Curry, a pharmacist at Baker's Pharmacy in Eugene.

When the drug was released, Eugene physician Kirk Jacobson prescribed it for a patient he was treating. The patient recently died.

"But he had several months of good quality of life," Jacobson said. "Whether that was related to AZT there's no way to tell. The only way you can tell is by comparing thousands of patients."

The drug's manufacturer, Burroughs Wellcome Co., conducted a broad test of the drug last year with 282 subjects. The subjects were divided into two groups: 145 subjects received Retrovir and 137 received a placebo.

After eight months of testing, 16 of the patients receiving the placebo had died compared to only one of the patients receiving Retrovir. Those patients receiving the drug showed significantly fewer AIDS-related difficulties.

The FDA approved the drug for wider use after the test.

Retrovir "is clearly not a cure," said Dr. John Allcott of the West Lane Health Clinic. "It may be useful for prolonging the life or improving the quality of life for some AIDS patients, but it does have significant side effects that limit its usefulness."

Portland's Dr. Mark Loveless said the side effects of Retrovir have been a serious concern in the cases for which he has prescribed the drug since it was made available.

He has prescribed Retrovir as treatment for about 15 patients since November of 1986, he said.

"The fact is that most people end up with

toxicity, so the results are discouraging," Loveless said.

The main side effect of the drug is anemia, a type of blood deficiency, he said. "And after three to four months, the people who need it most tend to not tolerate it very well."

Although studies have shown that Retrovir results in significant improvement for AIDS patients over a six- to eight-month period, Loveless said the drug's long-term effectiveness is unknown. "Now, after a year, we're seeing people (on Retrovir) have further deterioration of the immune system," he said. "We need a marker for how well the medication is inhibiting the AIDS virus."

"It's no cure. It maybe stems the tide of immune damage for some period, but the question of 'How long?' is difficult to predict — probably not forever," he added.

Nevertheless, Retrovir is the only medication available to reduce the activity of the AIDS-causing virus, Loveless said.

The key to Retrovir's successful use may be found in patients with AIDS-Related Complex, Loveless said. Retrovir may be most effective for those patients with mild to moderate immune system damage, he said.

Jacobson currently knows of three patients in Lane County being treated with Retrovir, he said. The drug is used only for AIDS patients who develop a rare form of pneumonia that is often associated with AIDS.

The pneumonia affects about one half of AIDS victims.

Currently in Oregon, there are about 75 AIDS patients and about 100 with ARC who would fit the criteria for treatment with Retrovir, Loveless estimated.

The manufacturer of Retrovir has established a series of requirements that patients must fulfill to receive the drug because of its limited supply, Curry said. "They want to make sure they don't start patients on therapy and then are unable to continue to supply them with the drug."

The limited supply of Retrovir also is resulting in astronomical costs for treatment of AIDS victims, Curry said. He estimated that treatment with the drug costs between \$8,000 and \$10,000 per patient each year.

Gov. Neil Goldschmidt has recommended that money be added to the Medicaid budget specifically for the treatment of AIDS patients.



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## Sister city project limits choices

By Janet Paulson  
Of the Emerald

Eugene moved one step closer to choosing a sister city in the Soviet Union on Monday night.

Members of the Soviet Sister City Project (SSCP) selected two potential cities to present to the Sister City International Committee, which will make the final decision.

Nal'chik, near the resort

region of the Black Sea, was unanimously selected as the committee's first choice for sister city. The second choice is Irkutsk in central Siberia, near Lake Baikal, the deepest lake in the world.

Members of Eugene's Soviet Sister City Committee, which includes the presidents of both the University of Oregon and Lane Community College, conducted research on 149 potential sister cities for five months before narrowing the choice down to Nal'chik and Irkutsk.

According to Chairwoman Kate Gessert, both Nal'chik and Irkutsk are representative of the committee's criteria, including the existence of a good-sized university or other higher learning institution, local agriculture, some lumber areas and a history "that would not be offensive to people in our community."

Several SSCP members will attend the Soviet-American Sister Cities Conference in Seattle this week where they will present the potential cities to Sister Cities International. The SSCP has organized an information package to introduce and "advertise" Eugene to potential Soviet sister cities.

Gessert said that it is not known when Sister Cities International will make the final decision for Eugene's sister city.

Six U.S. cities have had fairly long-term Soviet sister city relationships, the longest being that of Seattle and Tashkent in the U.S.S.R. Of the original six, about four have become inactive in the past few years, Gessert said.

As a result, the Soviet Union has been slow to accept new sister cities, although about 10 U.S. cities have reached the formal stage of negotiating sister city ties in the past year. The Soviet Union is expected to approve a new batch of sister cities in the next year or two, she said.

The SSCP was organized about six months ago with the goal of creating "greater understanding, appreciation and friendship between the peoples of the United States and the Soviet Union."

On May 13 the Eugene City Council formally designated the existing committee as the formal decision-making body to organize and oversee the Soviet sister city project.

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