



BY JEFFREY ZURLINDEN

rsCD4 still shows promise

An experimental drug called rsCD4 looks more promising as testing continues. Given as a shot, rsCD4 did not cause serious side effects and lowered the amount of HIV in men with ARC or AIDS. This drug works by clogging the place on HIV that normally attaches to T-cells, thereby preventing the clogged virus from infecting new T-cells. Researchers plan to continue experiments to find the greatest amount of rsCD4 that can be given without causing serious side effects.

Reference: R. Schooley and many others. *Recombinant soluble CD4 therapy in patients with AIDS and ARC.* *Annals of Internal Medicine.* Feb. 15, 1990, pp: 247-53.

Fluconazole approved

The drug fluconazole was approved by the Food and Drug Administration to treat two AIDS-related fungal infections — thrush and cryptococcal meningitis. Thrush infections in the mouth and throat may cause pain and difficulty swallowing. Thrush eventually occurs in 80 to 90 percent of people with ARC and AIDS. Fluconazole is also approved to treat cryptococcal meningitis, a life-threatening infection of the brain and the spinal cord. Compared to earlier drugs used to treat cryptococcal meningitis, fluconazole is as effective but causes many fewer side effects. Fluconazole is available as a tablet and an intravenous fluid under the trade name Diflucan.

New AZT dose

The Food and Drug Administration recommends that HIV-infected people taking AZT now take 600 milligrams daily — half the previously recommended dose. The FDA still recommends that people taking AZT start with one month of 1200 mg daily. According to studies at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, this new lower dose of AZT was found to be as effective as the higher dose, but it caused fewer side effects. However, these researchers were uncertain if the lower dose of AZT improved with thinking and memory problems that sometimes accompany infection with HIV.

New AIDS estimates

The Centers for Disease Control now estimates that 1 million Americans are infected with HIV; and 52,000 to 57,000 of them will be diagnosed with AIDS during 1990. The number of people with AIDS will increase each year; and during 1993, between 61,000 and 98,000 will be diagnosed. By comparison, last year approximately 35,000 were diagnosed with AIDS. The CDC also estimates that 60 percent of the people currently infected with HIV have fewer than 500 helper T-cells and would benefit from taking AZT. Although the number of people who are newly infected has dramatically decreased since 1987, approximately 40,000 adults and 2,000 infants will become infected with HIV this year. The largest number of newly infected people are expected to be IV drug users and the sexual partners of IV drug users. However, over half of the people diagnosed with AIDS last year were gay or bisexual men.

Reference: CDC. *Estimates of HIV prevalence and projected AIDS cases.* *MMWR.* Feb. 23, 1990, pp: 110-19.
 CDC. *Update: AIDS.* *MMWR.* Feb. 9, 1990, pp: 81-86.

New drug stops HIV

In laboratory tests, a new group of chemicals known as TIBO stop HIV from reproducing. According to Belgian scientists,

the new chemicals work at very low concentrations; and like AZT, they work by inhibiting reverse transcriptase. They hope that TIBO will be more powerful than AZT, yet have fewer side effects. So far, only six healthy volunteers have taken TIBO tablets and none of these volunteers had serious side effects.

Reference: R. Pauwels and others. *Potent and selective inhibition of HIV-1 replication in vitro by a novel series of TIBO derivatives.* *Nature.* Feb. 1, 1990, pp: 470-73.

Mice may be dangerous

Researchers should be wary of studying AIDS using mice, says Robert Gallo the grandfather of HIV research. HIV can combine with viruses that commonly infect mice; and at least in the test tube, produce new strains of HIV that spread easier and grow faster than the original HIV. This makes Gallo question the safety, as well as the results obtained from HIV-infected mice. Although it is easy to imagine a science fiction-like disaster caused by escaped mice, scientists working with HIV-infected mice already take severe precautions to guard against possible release of new viruses.

Reference: P. Lusso and others. *Expanded HIV-1 cellular tropism by phenotypic mixing with murine endogenous retroviruses.* *Science.* Feb. 16, 1990, pp: 848-51.

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