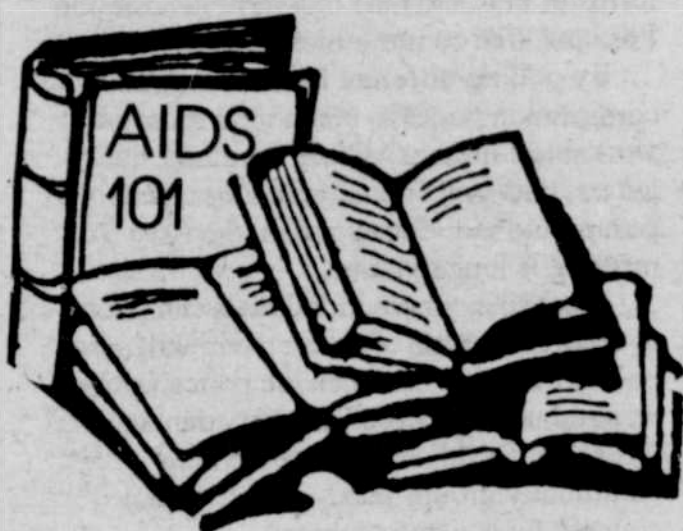


Controversial new drug for dementia

People with AIDS who also have mental deterioration may benefit from drugs known as calcium channel blockers, according to researchers at the Harvard Medical School. By studying rat brains, these researchers have shown that a portion of the outer coat of HIV upsets the delicate balance of calcium within brain cells and damages the brain. However, this balance can be restored by a calcium channel blocking drug called nimodipine. Calcium channel blockers are already used to treat high blood pressure and some kinds of heart disease. These researchers hope to soon test calcium channel blockers with PWAs who have mental problems stemming from HIV.

Reference: E. Dreyer and others. HIV-1 coat protein neurotoxicity prevented by calcium channel antagonists. *Science*, April 20, 1990: 346-66.



BY JEFFREY ZURLINDEN

ARC and AIDS

ARC and AIDS patients enrolled in a study to test AZT in combination with a drug called beta interferon were asked to stop taking the beta interferon. According to Dr. Von Roenn at Northwestern Memorial Hospital, there were no significant differences in the occurrence of opportunistic infections between the groups of people who took beta interferon, and the people who did not take the drug. Although data from the study will be analyzed later in greater detail, now it appears that people with ARC or AIDS do not benefit from taking beta interferon. Studies are continuing in Chicago to test the usefulness of beta interferon to treat Kaposi's sarcoma.

Compound Q moves ahead

Project Inform received approval from the Food and Drug Administration to resume its study of the controversial drug Compound Q with people with AIDS. Earlier, Project Inform had conducted unsanctioned trials with the drug. Critics of Compound Q complain that earlier studies showed little benefit from the drug. Critics also claim that continued research with Compound Q puts people with AIDS at undue risk and delays the study of more promising drugs.

Reference: J. Palca. Trials and tribulations of AIDS Drug Testing. *Science*, April 1990, pg: 1406.

Doctors warned of side effects from ddI

In a letter to doctors who treat people with AIDS, Bristol-Meyers Squibb Co. warned that people with AIDS may develop pancreatitis after taking the drug ddI. So far, 78 people have developed pancreatitis and seven have died as a result. Bristol-Meyers recommends that ddI not be given to people who abuse alcohol.

The drug company also warns against giving ddI to people who take certain medicines including Tylenol, opiates, antituberculous antibiotics, sulpha drugs, intravenous pentamidine, and others. DdI fights HIV, and is usually given to people who experience side effects from AZT.

A new protease shows promise

In test tube experiments, protease inhibitor Compound XVII, developed by Roche Products Ltd., was a potent killer of HIV and may cause few side effects. This new compound, like all protease inhibitors, interferes with the ability of HIV to build pieces of itself within the core of the virus and reproduce. Protease inhibitors work in an entirely different way than does AZT. However, protease is also needed by uninfected cells to remain healthy. In early experiments, Compound XVII selectively interfered with HIV without harming other healthy cells. Researchers hope that protease inhibitors will one day provide an effective therapy either alone or in combination with AZT.

Reference: N. Roberts and others. Rational design of peptide-based HIV protease inhibitors. *Science*, April 20, 1990: 358-61.

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