DDC now available

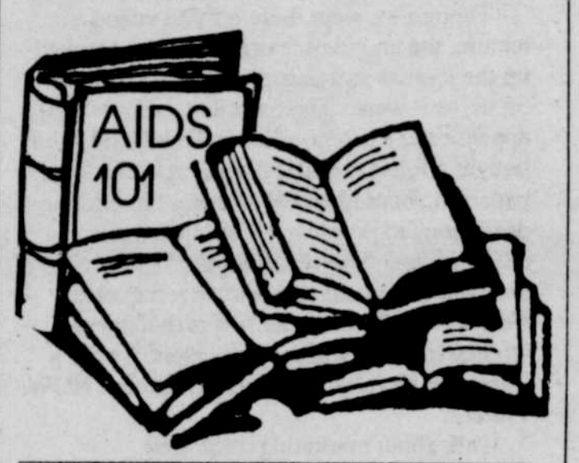
Some people with ARC and AIDS now have access to the anti-HIV drug DDC through an expanded research program. DDC is available to people who cannot take AZT or DDI because of the side effects these drugs cause, and to people who are no longer helped by AZT or DDI.

Hoffman-La Roche, the maker of DDC, will provide the drug free of charge. PWAs enroll in the study through their doctor who will contact the drug company, as well as distribute the drug.

Since the summer of 1989, drug trials have compared DDC with AZT, and compared different doses of DDC. Although these studies are not yet completed, DDC appears safe enough to give to a larger number of PWAs.

Initially, DDC was tested at high doses which damaged nerves and caused pain and numbness in the hands and feet. At lower doses the drug appears to cause many fewer side effects. However, doctors from the drug company will closely monitor patients in the study for side effects. People who have experienced pain and numbness while taking DDI will not be eligible to take DDC.

For more information about this study, telephone the U.S. Public Health Service at 1-800-TRIALS-A.



BY JEFFREY ZURLINDEN

New parallel track for AIDS drugs

In an effort to speed new drugs to people with AIDS, the Public Health Service has proposed a new parallel track for experimental AIDS drugs.

On the parallel track, experimental drugs showing promise to treat either HIV infection or opportunistic infections will be available much sooner than the old system allowed. The parallel track will enable selected patients with AIDS to receive experimental drugs before traditional clinical trials are completed.

Until July 20, the Public Health Service is seeking comments from the scientific and AIDS communities about the proposed system. It is uncertain when the system will begin; and at this time, there are no drugs slated for the parallel track, according to a FDA representative.

"We are proposing this initiative," said Dr. James Mason, assistant secretary for health, "because of its potential for prolonging lives. It is the appropriate step to take at this time."

People who receive experimental drugs through the parallel track must have no other therapeutic alternatives, have immediately life-threatening disease, and be unable to participate in traditional clinical trials. This will especially help people who are too sick to participate in traditional drug trials, live far from a research center, or live where traditional drug trials are closed to new participants, (which many currently are).

In order to receive drugs on the parallel track, people with AIDS must sign a consent form and cooperate with ongoing data collection to monitor the safety and effectiveness of the new drugs. Unlike drugs that are fully approved, parallel track drugs are not proved to be effective and may expose PWAs to unknown side effects.

The new system resulted from the efforts of ACT UP, Project Inform, the National Association of People with AIDS, and physicians caring for PWAs.

New drug means fewer blood transfusions

People taking AZT may need fewer blood transfusions if they also take a new drug call Eprex, a man-mad erythropoietin, say researchers. Erythropoietin is a naturally-occurring hormone that keeps the number of red blood cells in balance. AZT frequently throws erythropoietin out of balance leading to a decreased number of red blood cells, a kind of anemia.

During a 12-week experiment, people taking AZT also got an injection of Eprex into a vein three times weekly. Fewer of the people who took Eprex needed blood transfusions, and when they received transfusions, they needed less blood.

However, a blood test at the start of the experiment predicted people with low levels of naturally-occurring erythropoietin benefited the most from Eprex. The people taking Eprex did not have any serious side effects from taking the drug.

For the past year, man-made erythropoietin has been available to people who are anemic from kidney dialysis. Instead of receiving Eprex through a vein, Eprex can also be injected into the fat just below some areas of skin. Although man-made erythropoietin is already available, the makers of Eprex expect the drug will soon be fully approved for people taking AZT.