

REASONS FOR HOPE

VIRAL LOAD TESTS AVAILABLE

For individuals who do not have health coverage that pays for viral load tests and cannot afford to pay for them, Roche Diagnostics, the makers of the Amplicor PCR test, has a program which may enable you to access coverage for the tests or to get them free. There are, however, limitations on the number of free tests the company gives away in any particular month. To apply, you or your doctor should call 1-888-837-8727.

HIV/AIDS

REMEMBER TO REFRIGERATE

RITONAVIR

The protease inhibitor ritonavir, marketed by Abbott Laboratories under the trade name Norvir, must be kept refrigerated to retain its potency. The liquid form may be left unrefrigerated for up to 8 hours, however the more popular capsules should always be kept cold.

While most users of ritonavir have kept this in mind, there are concerns about a small number of pharmacies where orders for ritonavir, once filled, are left unrefrigerated in out baskets while awaiting pickup. If this happens, you should refuse that bottle and ask for a refrigerated one. If you or your pharmacist has particular questions about a bottle left unrefrigerated, you may call Abbott at 1-800-441-4987. While most pharmacists understand the importance of keeping such a product cold, it can't hurt to remind the pharmacy to keep it refrigerated when you call in your order.



PROTEASE EXPANDED ACCESS FOR ADULTS

Agouron Pharmaceuticals, the maker of the new protease inhibitor nelfinavir (trade name Viracept), has been busy with announcements since it applied for FDA approval. When Agouron originally announced its expanded access program in October, it was viewed as too restrictive by most treatment advocates. Among the recent announcements are new guidelines for the program. Any HIV-positive adult who has ever had a T-cell test under 100 (cells per cubic millimeter) and who is unable to take indinavir (Crixivan) and/or ritonavir (Norvir) will be eligible to receive nelfinavir without charge. This applies to people who have an intolerance for either of these products or who have previously failed one or both of them. Information on this Viracept Expanded Access Program is available by calling 1-800-621-7111.

This is a significant improvement over the original program, which only applied to individuals who tested under 50 T cells and who could not take any of the three already approved protease inhibitors.

PROTEASE INHIBITOR FOR CHILDREN AVAILABLE

Another Agouron announcement concerned the oral powder formulation of nelfinavir for children, which can be mixed with milk, formula or soft foods. It is being offered free of charge to any HIV-positive child between the ages of 2 and 13 from now until the product is approved for marketing. For information on

this Pediatric Expanded Access Program, call 1-800-621-7111. Currently there are no protease inhibitors approved for pediatric use, however, early studies have indicated that nelfinavir is safe and well-tolerated in children. Preliminary results of a pediatric study were announced at the 4th Annual Retrovirology Conference held in Washington, D.C., in January and will be reported in the next "Reasons for Hope" column.

CONSUMER-FRIENDLY PROTEASE INHIBITOR TRIAL

Agouron has also announced that nelfinavir will be tested in a clinical trial for people with fewer than 100 T cells conducted by the Community Programs for Clinical Research on AIDS. The trial is considered consumer friendly because it has no inferior therapies where participants might get an antiviral or antiviral combination not up to current standards. This trial will randomly assign participants to receive either nelfinavir plus nucleoside analogues or ritonavir plus nucleoside analogues. The trial of 1,300 participants will last for one year. For enrollment and site information, call 1-800-TRIALS-A (1-800-874-2572). People who are unable to take saquinavir (Inverase) are eligible for the trial, but those who cannot take either indinavir (Crixivan) or ritonavir (Norvir) are not eligible, and should instead consider the Expanded Access Program discussed above.

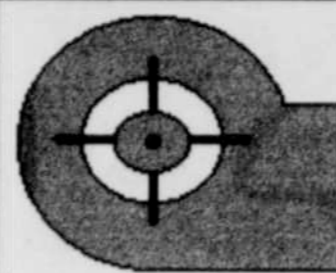
NUCLEOTIDE ANALOGUE TRIAL

Another type of trial considered consumer friendly involves allowing participants to continue to use their normal regimen of anti-retrovirals while being randomly assigned either to add another product or a placebo. One such trial, sponsored by Gilead Sciences, tests a new type of product known as a nucleotide analogue. Nucleotide analogues are similar to nucleoside analogues (or nukes) such as AZT or ddI, but these drugs have been further processed. The particular product in this trial, known as GS 840 (adefovir dipivoxil), has only lowered viral loads by modest amounts, but so far has not had any resistant strains of the virus emerge. Adding it to an already powerful combination may prove useful. People with 200 T cells or more are eligible for this trial. Another study of GS 840, which will evaluate its impact on CMV, is open to individuals with fewer than 100 T cells. For information about enrollment and sites for either study, call 1-800-TRIALS-A (1-800-874-2572).

'SALK IMMUNOGEN' TRIAL

The therapeutic vaccine Remune (commonly known as the Salk HIV Vaccine) is also in a trial which allows participants to continue to use their desired anti-retroviral combination while being randomly assigned to either receive Remune or a placebo. Individuals who have never had an AIDS-related opportunistic infection and whose T-cell count is between 300 and 549 are eligible for the trial. For information on sites and enrollment, call 1-800-684-8624. Those not eligible for the trial may ask about an open-label protocol. The data on Remune, while positive, has not been overwhelming. However the logic of attempting to increase some forms of HIV 1-specific immunity has a solid basis.

Reported by the Boston AIDS Writers Group, which consists of Robert Folan and Lou Pesce of ACT UP Boston; David Scondras, Robert Krebs, Derek Libby and Larry Bresslour from Search for a Cure; and Jeff Terry.



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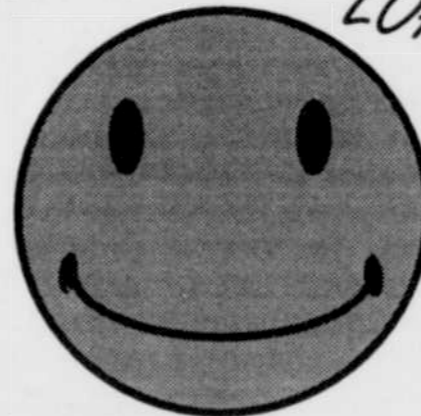
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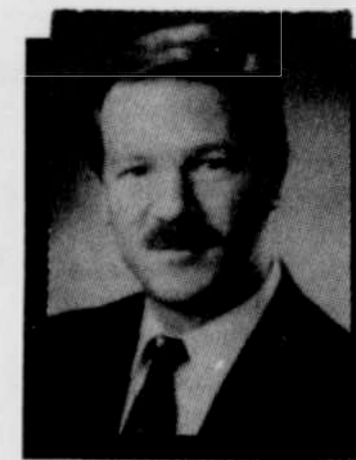
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