

# UNMC to participate in nationwide test of drug Triple treatment plan may

By Jeff Zeleny

Breakfast typically gives one food for thought, but Yung-Kang Chow's breakfast one morning yielded more than a thought; it produced a possible solution.

Chow may have discovered the cure for AIDS.

A Harvard medical student, Chow clinched his work on a three-drug combination that is hoped to significantly change AIDS research across the country.

Chow's drug combination of the current AIDS fighting drugs, AZT and DDI, plus the drug Nevirapine, makes the three-drug plan look positive, said Dr. Susan Swindells, medical director of the UNMC HIV Clinic.

The University of Nebraska Medical Center was one of 20 centers chosen by the National Institute of Health as a drug testing site. UNMC will work in cooperation with the AIDS Clinical Trial Network, an organization of doctors and researchers from around the country.

Although some see the

work at the 20 centers as duplication, Swindells said it was good to have the testing going on at many venues.

"It makes it a lot more efficient when people are doing the same thing," she said, "so we can all compare apples to apples."

The treatment plan won't start at UNMC until June, when it receives approval from the Food and Drug Administration. Preliminary test tube experiments produced positive results, but that is no guarantee it will be successful.

"People are very different than test tubes, of course," Swindells said.

When used separately, the drugs help cure certain parts of the disease but have no affect on others. The drug combination is expected to stop the virus from dividing and multiplying, Swindells said, but the virus still wouldn't be killed.

AIDS research has grown consistently since Swindells came to UNMC 18 months ago. Over 460 patients from Nebraska, Iowa, South

Dakota, North Dakota and Kansas are now enrolled in the HIV Clinic, which opened in 1987.

Most patients in the clinic are HIV-infected. Only 100 have full-blown AIDS, Swindells said. Almost all of the clinic patients participate in the research studies, which provide free benefits.

Patients get paid for studies that they don't benefit from. One such study involves HIV-infected smokers. Doctors probe patient's lungs, which isn't a pleasant process, she said.

"They personally aren't benefitting, just the society at large benefits."

It is difficult to turn people away from research studies, but Swindells said all 460 patients can't participate.

"We don't always have a study for everyone," she said. "All of the studies have inclusion criteria, sometimes people aren't eligible."

Patients that actively abuse alcohol or other drugs are always denied participation in research studies, Swindells said.

"It doesn't help anyone if they refuse to comply."

Finances play no part in treatment, Swindells said, and patients without health insurance are usually treated.

"It doesn't matter to me, but sometimes we do have to make judgments."

Many research studies at UNMC involve HIV-infected hemophiliac children. Growth development studies are done on the children to see how they compare to their healthy siblings.

"We basically monitor a lot of things about these kids," Swindells said, "what (their) cognitive skills are and sexual development."

Although UNMC is a small AIDS facility in comparison to other centers in the United States, Swindells said Nebraskans and other Midwesterners are fortunate to have any type of AIDS clinic, let alone one with the quality and technology of UNMC's.

"Just because you live in Nebraska doesn't mean you can't get the research.

"I compete with New York,

Miami and California," she said. "It's taken some work to get the foot into the door."

The competitive efforts paid off and helped bring a new blood-filtering device to the medical center for a treatment test study which will begin this month.

UNMC will be the first test site for the device which removes blood substances that cause complicating symptoms to the AIDS virus.

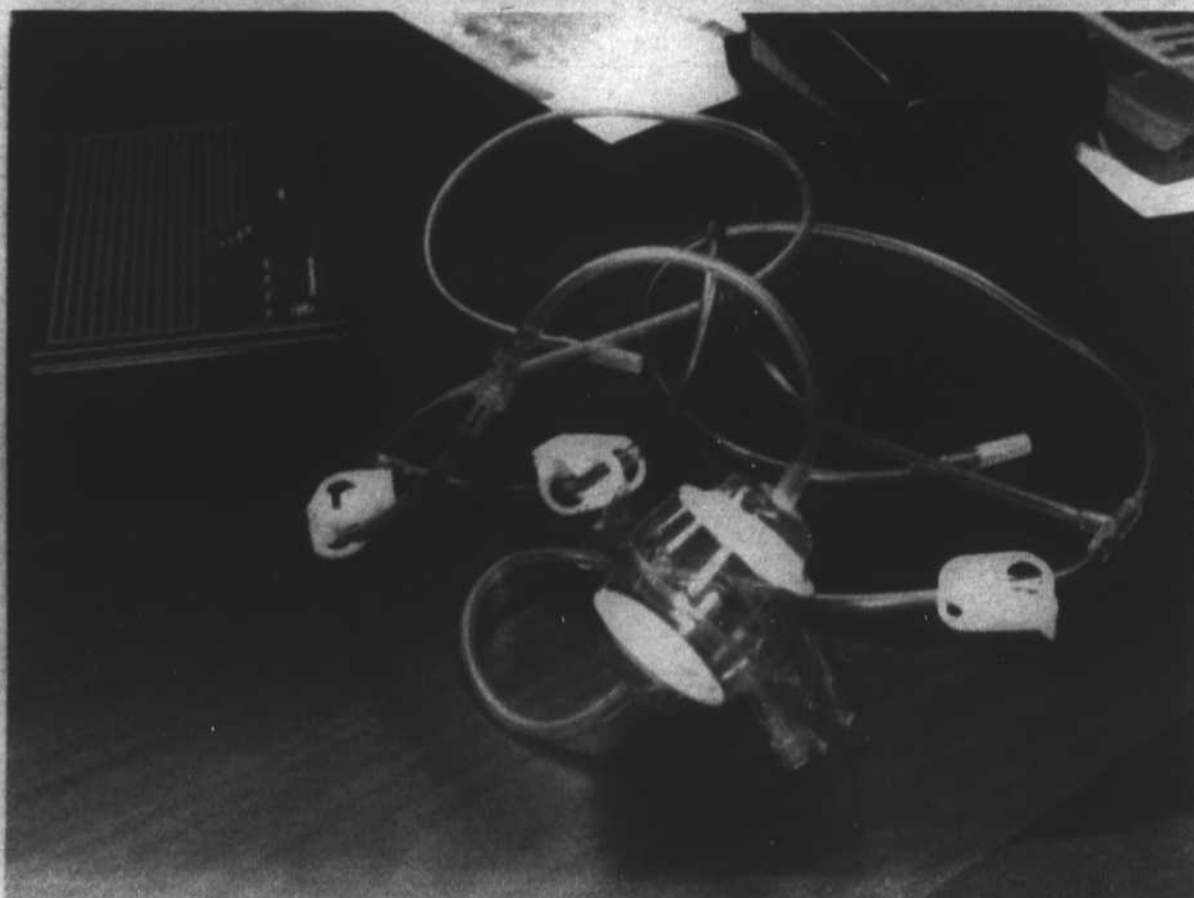
"Why does this thing in white blood cells make you ill?" she said. "We don't understand the fever, sweating and rashes."

The filtering device cleanses the blood of bad proteins through the four-hour plasmapheresis and returns it back to the body. The approach is similar to one used on cancer patients.

The device can't be used until approval is granted from the FDA, she said.

"Whenever you do a study the FDA is all over you," she said. "They must jump through a lot of hoops.

"The first test isn't 'Will it work?' it's 'Is it safe?'"



This blood-filtering device will be used in the AIDS study at UNMC.

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