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Judge rules driving teen responsible for deaths

OMAHA (AP) — The sole surviving teen of a crash that killed three high school students was driving the car and responsible for her friends' deaths, a judge ruled Wednesday.

Kristen Decker, 17, was convicted in Juvenile Court of three misdemeanor charges of motor vehicle homicide and one drunken driving count.

Judge Donald Hamilton ruled that Miss Decker was driving the car that went out of control after cresting a hill where young drivers have been known to speed and become airborne.

Miss Decker's lawyer had argued that she may not have been the driver and that all of the teens had

been drinking.

A later hearing will determine what penalties Miss Decker faces. Her attorney, Roger Holthaus, said he believed she would be placed on probation. If convicted as an adult, she could have faced up to three years in jail.

Prosecution and defense attorneys had argued over whether Miss Decker was driving the car when it went out of control and crashed April 1 after cresting a hill known as the "State Street Jump" northwest of Omaha. Police said the car was traveling an estimated 77 mph.

"The totality of the evidence proves beyond a reasonable doubt that ... Kristen Decker was the

driver," Hamilton said in a written decision after a two-day trial.

Three friends in the car with Miss Decker — Jaydn Lombardi and Matthew Guilfoyle, both 16, and Janelle Papillon, 17 — were killed in the crash. The car was registered to Decker's parents.

Authorities said Miss Decker had a blood-alcohol level of 0.06 percent the night of the accident. She was charged with violating a state law that prohibits minors from driving with a blood-alcohol level of 0.02 percent or higher.

A pathologist testified that Guilfoyle's blood-alcohol level was nearly 0.05 percent, Lombardi's was 0.10 percent and Papillon's was 0.22 percent, Holthaus said.

Women's Week Celebration

Heather Whitestone
Miss America 1995



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7:30
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Doctors find treatment to rebuild AIDS-damaged immune systems

BOSTON (AP) — Doctors have shown for the first time they can rebuild the immune systems of people infected with the AIDS virus, dramatically increasing the blood cells that HIV destroys.

The AIDS virus typically takes 10 years to kill a person. During this time, the virus relentlessly destroys a variety of disease-fighting white blood cells called helper T cells.

If the new treatment works as doctors hope, it could tip the balance in favor of the body, allowing it to produce these cells faster than the virus can kill them.

"This is the first time I truly ... feel excited" about an AIDS treatment, said Dr. H. Clifford Lane, a researcher at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases who reported his findings in Thursday's issue of the New England Journal of Medicine.

The new approach involves on-and-off infusions of interleukin 2, a

natural protein that regulates the body's immune defenses. It worked only in those patients who were infected with the virus but had not yet developed AIDS.

Some patients have been taking it for up to 3 1/2 years with no sign of

AIDS Research

waning effectiveness—something no other medicine has accomplished.

The new treatment carries a serious side effects that mimic a severe case of flu. Furthermore, researchers have not tested it long enough to be able to prove that it actually helps patients stay healthy longer.

T cells back up again, but only if people still have at least 400 cells per cubic millimeter to start with. Among 10 patients described in the study, six

responded to the treatment with at least 50 percent increases in their helper cells. One patient's levels rose from 554 to 1,998.

In all, the doctors have treated about 100 patients, and the results look consistently good in people whose T cells had not already been depleted.

"You stimulate the cells, let them rest, and they grow," Lane said.

However, among people with very low levels of helper T cells, especially under 200, the treatment might actually be dangerous, since it triggers an initial burst of virus production but fails to boost the immune system.

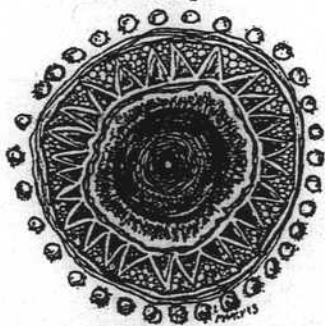
IL-2, a genetically engineered drug, has already been approved by the Food and Drug Administration for treatment of kidney cancer.

Dr. Robert Schooley of the University of Colorado noted that some doctors are routinely using it for AIDS without understanding the hazards for people with very low cell counts.

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Daily Nebraskan

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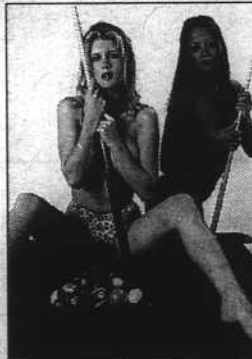
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