

## New AIDS drug treatment shows promise in stalling deadly disease

WASHINGTON—A triple-punch combination of an experimental new AIDS drug and two others already on the market is by far the most potent treatment yet for people infected with the deadly virus, researchers reported Monday.

The therapy does not cure AIDS. At best, it will slow and perhaps stall the disease for long periods. Even this could be a significant advance, since currently available virus medicines do little to extend AIDS patients' lives.

The treatment involves one of a new class of drugs called protease inhibitors and is still in early stages of human testing. Nevertheless, AIDS researchers who have seen many promising initial results go sour in the past are enthusiastic about the latest findings.

"It's wonderfully exciting. It's a milestone," said Dr. Gerald Friedland of Yale University.

The key to the new combination is indinavir, a still-experimental protease inhibitor developed by Merck & Co. It is combined with the standard AIDS medicines AZT and 3TC.

Dr. Roy Gulick and colleagues from New York University gave the combination to 26 patients. After six months, they could find no measurable trace of the AIDS virus in 24 of them. Their treatment is continuing, but researchers say it is still too soon to know how long this effect will last.

Gulick planned to present his results in detail Thursday at the annual Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections, an AIDS meeting sponsored by the Infectious Disease Society of America.

However, Dr. Emilio Emini of Merck released some of the findings at the meeting Monday at a standing-room-only session on protease inhibitors.

"This is the best response of any anti-retroviral therapy that has been seen to date," said Gulick, and several other AIDS experts at the meeting agreed.

"We all share the excitement of the moment that long-term suppression of this virus is real," said Dr. Paul Volberding of the University of California, San Francisco.

Other AIDS drugs on the market work by

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**DR. PAUL VOLBERDING**

University of California, San Francisco

Dr. Douglas Richman of the University of California, San Diego, speculated that because the combination so sharply suppresses growth of the virus, it will hold down the evolution of resistant strains of HIV, as well as intercepting the virus at a different stage in its reproduction. These standard medicines can inhibit the virus briefly but quickly lose their punch as mutant forms of HIV evolve that are immune to their effects.

A major question is whether—and how quickly—HIV will become resistant to protease inhibitors, too.

## Navy fighter jet crash kills 5 in Tennessee

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—A Navy F-14 fighter jet heavy with fuel crashed in a huge fireball into a neighborhood Monday, demolishing three houses and killing five people. The pilot had been blamed for a previous accident.

Three of the dead were in a house that took a direct hit from the Tomcat, as the F-14 is known. The others killed were the plane's two-member crew.

The Navy identified the pilot as Lt. Cmdr. John Stacy Bates, 33, originally of Chattanooga. The radar interceptor officer was identified as Lt. Graham Alden Higgins, 28, from Dover-Foxcroft, Maine.

Neither ejected before the crash. In the earlier crash, off the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, Bates lost control of his F-14 and crashed into the Pacific Ocean during maneuvers with another fighter. He and the radar intercept officer ejected.

Cmdr. Gregg Hartung, a Navy spokesman, said Monday night that pilot error was the cause of the April 1995 crash.

Bates went before a Field Naval Aviator Evaluation Board and was recommended fully qualified for return to flight status. That judgment was based on several factors, such as past performance, attitude and flying record, Hartung said.

Bates' fighter squadron, VF 213, has had four accidents in the last 16 months, including the October 1994 fatal crash involving Lt. Kara Hultgreen, one of the first women to qualify for a Navy combat aviation assignment.

The F-14 had taken off Monday from Nashville International Airport on a training mission, returning to its base at the Miramar Naval Air Station near San Diego.

The fighter jet hit one house, engulfing homes to either side in flames and littering the neighborhood with plane parts.

The fireball could be seen for miles from the wooded, working-class neighborhood of brick homes where the crash occurred under overcast skies.

"One guy was just sitting in his couch. He never had a chance. They were all just sitting where they were," said firefighter James Dean.

The cause of the crash was not immediately known. The Pentagon sent a team of investigators.

Elmer Newsom, 66, and his wife, Ada Newsom, 63, were killed in their home, police said. A visiting friend, Ewing T. Wair, 53, also was killed.

The F-14 is a supersonic, twin-engine fighter designed to attack enemy aircraft at night and in any weather. Its crew consists of a pilot and a radar intercept officer. It typically carries missiles, rockets and bombs, but the Navy said the plane that went down on Monday was not armed.

The jet, built by Grumman, was introduced in the Navy in the 1970s and is no longer in production.

According to the Navy, this was the 30th crash of an F-14 since 1991, including 11 in 1993, five in 1994 and seven in 1995.

It has a better than average safety record based on the number of "class A mishaps" per 100,000 flying hours. Class A mishaps are those that result in a death or at least \$1 million in damage to the aircraft.

## News in a Minute

### Police search on-line records

WASHINGTON—A killing in New Jersey that led authorities to a gay "chat room" on America Online resulted in a search of the company's headquarters.

Police in Fairfax County, Va., performed what was described as the first such search of the on-line service records as part of the murder investigation.

The incident underscores how on-line computer discussions and e-mail, which many computer users regard as private, are vulnerable to routine criminal investigation.

Law enforcement sources, however, said that to obtain most computer records, investigators will have to seek search warrants under the same standards that now apply to searches of private homes.

### Thieves snatch Henson's Muppets

ERFURT, Germany—Miss Piggy was under police protection Monday, after her colleagues Ernie and Bert were abducted.

Thieves knocked through a wall and plundered an exhibit of original Muppet puppets overnight Sunday at the Erfurt Garden Show. They also smashed a glass case, trying to rip Miss Piggy from her display, but were unsuccessful.

"We have not yet determined how extensive the damage was" to Miss Piggy, said exhibit organizer Adolf Blaschka.

Miss Piggy was placed in police custody Monday.

Police said no ransom note was left for the puppets.

### Fire destroys opera house

VENICE, Italy—A fire Monday evening destroyed the opera house La Fenice, a 204-year-old treasure that was one of Italy's greatest artistic institutions.

La Fenice means "the phoenix," and like the mythical bird for which it was named, the theater has burned before and risen from its ashes. A blaze slowed construction of the theater before it opened in 1792, and it was rebuilt after a fire in 1836.

"Let's hope this bird rises again from the ashes," tenor Luciano Pavarotti told RAI state television. "I'm devastated. It really was a jewel of Italy."

## Kevorkian attends suicide of 48-year-old MS patient

PONTIAC, Mich.—Dr. Jack Kevorkian took part in suicide No. 27, that of a 48-year-old woman with multiple sclerosis whose bathrobe-clad body was found in Kevorkian's battered van outside the coroner's office Monday.

Linda Henslee, 48, of Beloit, Wis., died of carbon monoxide poisoning, Medical Examiner L.J. Dragovic said.

Her body was found around 6 a.m. after someone called the office and said to "check out the vehicle in the parking lot," Sheriff's Capt. Barnett Jones said.

It is the third time in the past year that a body has been left in one of Kevorkian's vehicles near the medical examiner's office, in an area Sheriff John Nichols said has been nicknamed "Kevorkian Drive."

"There's no observation of dignity to have the body of a woman dropped off at the morgue at 6 in the morning on a freezing day. It shows a ghoulish disrespect for the sanctity of human life," prosecutor Lawrence Bunting said.

Fieger refused to say how, where or when the woman died. He said she was brought to Michigan last week by two daughters and an unidentified friend. The three, with Kevorkian, were present when she died.

Henslee was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis 20 years ago, and by the time she died was completely incapacitated, unable to eat or use the bathroom without help, Fieger said.

"You could just tell she was miserable," said Lori Coolidge, a hairdresser whose shop is next door to the house where Henslee lived with her

*"You could just tell she was miserable. She just couldn't do anything."*

**LORI COOLIDGE**

MS patient's hairdresser

daughter Dawn. "She just couldn't do anything."

Coolidge said she shampooed Henslee's hair. "The day I came over and did it, we just kind of had to flop her head over a counter. ... She couldn't feed herself. She had no control over her hands," she said.

Kevorkian has helped in the suicides of at least 27 people since 1990. Fieger refused to say if Kevorkian has attended other, unpublicized deaths.

Fieger said it was coincidence that Henslee died two weeks before Kevorkian's trial on assisted suicide charges in two 1993 deaths. He also faces charges in two other deaths.

No immediate charges were filed in the latest suicide.

"Dr. Kevorkian encouraged her, 'Why don't you wait until next week, next month.' ... She insisted, 'My time is now.'" Fieger said.

Fieger refused to say where Kevorkian was. No one answered the telephone at Kevorkian's home and the house appeared to be unoccupied.

## San Francisco approves symbolic gay marriages

SAN FRANCISCO—The city's Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a measure Monday that gives gay couples the right to a symbolic wedding ceremony beginning in April.

"San Francisco is once again illustrating that this is a humane, compassionate and equal opportunity city for all people who live here," said Supervisor Carole Migden, sponsor of the proposal.

The measure must have another reading Monday, then becomes law March 21.

The civil ceremonies would recognize domestic partnerships, but would not be legal marriages. They would only solemnize the rights the city has granted gay couples since its domestic partnership law took effect on Valentine's Day in 1991.

The measure would not entitle partners to traditional benefits married people get.

The 1991 ordinance gives domestic partners visitation rights in hospitals, shared health plans for city employees and bereavement leave for

city employees when a domestic partner dies. Private employers are not required to grant the same benefits.

Only couples registered as domestic partners in San Francisco would be eligible for the ceremony. At least 3,000 unmarried couples, most of them gay, already have filed for that designation, at a cost of \$35 a couple.

Weddings would be performed by the county clerk, or anyone else deputized by the clerk, and could be held anywhere from City Hall to churches where clergy members agree to perform the ceremony.

San Francisco's effort to recognize long-term homosexual partnerships is at odds with a state effort. The state Assembly is scheduled to study a bill Tuesday that would prohibit California from recognizing same-sex marriages, whether performed inside the state or outside—for example in Hawaii, where gay marriages could be legalized next year.

## Daily Nebraskan

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