Haartbeats

Med-news nuggets from CROI, the year's biggest AIDS confab:

May 1, 2005 By Tim Murphy

FAT FOLLIES In two 2-year studies of arm and leg fat loss (lipoatrophy), ditching a multi-nuke combo for one with only a protease inhibitor (PI) and a non-nuke modestly restored fat—and still controlled HIV. Another study found that replacing AZT or Zerit with Ziagen or Viread let HIVers regain a bit o' fat over a year. Zerit has long been tied to fat loss, but "AZT's getting the heat now" for milder cases, says treatment activist Nelson Vergel.

VIRAL VANQUISHERS Countering critics of triple-nuke combos, Combivir (AZT + 3TC) plus Viread controlled most HIVers' viral loads for about eight months in a small French study. A San Fran study found that taking meds only 70 percent of the time controlled viral loads in HIVers on non-nuke–based regimens, but not in those on unboosted PI-based combos (likely because non-nukes last a *loooong* time in your body).

BEST TESTS Two studies endorsed the effectiveness of checking blood levels of HIVers' HAART meds, then adjusting doses as needed—stoking the argument for therapeutic drug monitoring (TDM) A study of HIVer women found that 36 percent who had normal *cervical* Pap smears turned up with abnormal *anal* Paps—reminding the ladies to have doc swab back there, too.

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