Paunch Punch

June 1, 2004 By Tim Murphy

My STARS! The Serostim for the Treatment of Adipose Redistribution Study, that is. It found that 12 weeks of Serostim (human growth hormone), FDA-OK'd thus far only to treat AIDS wasting, significantly reversed lipo's dreaded "protease paunch." Too bad the staggering $7,000-a-month price tag often puts the drug out of reach for private-plan or Medicaid HIVers who need it for wasting, much less off label for lipo.

That may change: Serono, the drug's maker, is talking to the FDA about further studies of Serostim to lick lipo, which could lead to approval for such use—and then HMOs and Medicaid could pick up the tab. But don't hold your breath: Though Serono rep Carolyn Castel says, "We're very committed" to pursuing Serostim for lipo, Tim Horn of AIDS Treatment Activists Coalition says, "There are a number of questions to be answered before it can be used safely and effectively" for that. (For one, Serostim can raise glucose levels, which are already high in many HIVers with lipo.)

And will STARS' smaller daily dose of the injectable for lipo (compared to the amount used for wasting) reduce the price? "It's way too premature to say," Castel insists. Meanwhile, find a doc who's a whiz with those HMO codes.

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