Can One of These “Trojan Horses” Help Cure HIV?

This amfAR grant hopes to find out. It’s part of $1.16 million in new funding from ARCHE.

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Two new grants totaling $1.16 million will help fund a pair of research projects—one will investigate a genetic approach to curing HIV, and another will examine people living with HIV who are able to control the virus after stopping treatment, also called posttreatment controllers, or PTCs.

The funding arrives from amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research. More specifically, the two grants come from the amfAR Research Consortium on HIV Eradication (ARCHE).

According to an amfAR press release, Keith Jerome, PhD, of the University of Washington in Seattle, was awarded $344,000 for his work involving a gene therapy cure for HIV. In order to alter DNA, researchers like Jerome are investigating whether gene-editing tools can be injected directly into a patient (called “in vivo” gene therapy) and then delivered to the appropriate target inside vectors that function as Trojan horses. Jerome’s team will compare 11 vectors, which can then be used in future studies

Another funding interest of ARCHE’s is posttreatment controllers (PTCs). Jonathan Li, MD, of Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston was awarded $815,000 to gather and study samples from a multinational group of PTCs. The goal is to discover which method helps these people control their HIV—and to see whether the findings can eventually enable all people with HIV control the virus without meds.

“We’re excited to be supporting these immensely talented research teams and their very different but very promising avenues of investigation,” said Rowena Johnston, PhD, amfAR vice president and director of research, in the press release. “These research areas have enormous potential for giving us the tools to control the virus without the need for lifelong treatment or, in the case of gene therapy, to eliminate it altogether. Either outcome could dramatically alter the lives of the millions of people living with HIV worldwide.”

ARCHE is one of five categories of grants amfAR awards as part of its HIV cure strategy. To learn more, click here.

In April, amfAR announced two other rounds of funding. For details, see “$1.6M in Grants to HIV Cure Researchers Targeting the Reservoir.” In related news from earlier this year, amfAR’s Johnston took part in a panel discussion about female researchers. Watch a video of the event and read more at “Why Women Are a Vital Part of HIV Cure Research.”

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