Cure: Ethics

Cure studies typically require a temporary break in HIV treatment, often with little promise of a personal benefit to the participant.

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Researchers have firmly established that people living with HIV can best protect their health by starting antiretroviral (ARV) medications as early as possible and staying on them indefinitely. Even taking structured breaks from treatment was proved harmful in the mid-2000s. And yet, at this early stage in overall HIV cure research, investigators often need to take study participants off ARVs for limited times to analyze how the virus behaves in the absence of such suppressive medications. Unfortunately, today's cure studies typically cannot promise any major personal benefit to their participants. Rather, the hoped-for benefit is usually restricted to a contribution to greater scientific knowledge. And even though such treatment interruptions involve very close, rigorous monitoring of participants to mitigate risks, the consequences—in particular long-term ones—may be unknown. This introduces a delicate ethical balance when it comes to informing such individuals about the risks associated with such research.

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