Gazette-August/September 1994

What's news in the world of AIDS

August 1, 1994 By Bill Henning

Mepron Breakthroughs

Burroughs Wellcome's Mepron (atovaquone) was approved last year for use in patients with mild to moderate Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia (PCP) who are intolerant of the drug Bactrim. Unfortunately Notes from the Underground recently reported that the drug may not be well-absorbed by many PWAs. Mepron needs to be bind to fat in order to be absorbed by the body, so a diet with moderate to high levels of fat is recommended. Furthermore many PWAs (especially those with sever diarrhea) have trouble absorbing fat regardless of how much they eat. People on the drug and their doctors are encouraged to watch their symptoms closely. If the drug is not being absorbed properly, mild or moderate cases of PCP can quickly worsen and people taking Mepron for PCP prophylaxis can come down with the disease.

Younger Every Day

National Cancer Institute researchers reported recently that the average age when people become infected with HIV has dropped significantly. The report in The New England Journal of Medicine said that in the early 1980s the average age upon infection was more than 30; but by 1991 it had dropped to 25. The scientists also found that the progression of the disease was slower in people who were infected at a younger age.

A Representative Congress

Three openly HIV positive people have already announced their candidacy for seats in Congress. New York City Council member Tom Duane is seeking the Democratic nomination for the seat on Manhattan's west side currently held by fellow Democrat Jerry Nadler. In Wisconsin, AIDS lecturer Mike Johnson is seeking the Republican nomination in his district. And Brooklyn Democrat Joe Franco is a candidate for Daniel P. Moynihan's Senate seat.

Salk Vaccine Update

Polio vaccine discoverer, Jonas Salk, has differed with most of the HIV vaccine researchers by suggesting that killed, whole HIV will make the most effective vaccine. His colleagues recently announced the first results of their testing of the group's vaccine against HIV and the Boston Globe reported that initial testing of the Salk vaccine in HIV positive volunteers had significantly slowed the growth of the virus. This does not, however, guarantee that the vaccine can slow progression to AIDS. Salk researchers now need to enroll at least 4,000 subjects at as many as 40

medical centers in order to explore that possibility.

Publish or Perish
October is the scheduled debut for AIDS Digest, an Utne Reader-type quarterly magazine that will compile the best newspaper, magazine, television, radio and academic articles about AIDS. The team behind the Digest is impressive and includes former Vanity Fair publisher Doug Johnston, Seventeen and Travel & Leisure redesigner Lloyd Ziff, investment banker Barry Levien and AIDS author Steven Petrow. AIDS Digest will reportedly not accept paid advertising, relying instead on corporate sponsorships. On a sad note, Chicago-based national AIDS magazine, Plus Voice, recently ceased publication after one issue due to financial difficulties.

Follow-up
When HIV positive artist Barton Benes took 30 of his works to Sweden for an exhibition recently he didn't foresee having to bake them in an oven. But that's what happened as part of a deal he struck with Swedish officials who banned the sale of his works. Benes, whose AIDS-themed art frequently contains HIV infected blood and other bodily fluids was profiled in POZ No. 1. Although the exhibit itself was allowed, the Swedish government prohibited the American's gallery from selling the works unless they could be certified by doctors as safe for sale. "All 30 of the works were put in an oven for two and a half hours. One of them melted," says the artist who is now awaiting final approval from the Swedish government to sell his works, several of which already have buyers. "The whole show is about people's fears," he says. There is, of course, plenty of irony to go around.
-Mario Quirce

Cellblock A
The Chicago Tribune reports that the Michigan Corrections Organization, the union representing the guards who supervise the state's 37,000 prison inmates, is pressing for complete segregation of HIV positive prisoners. The state's department of corrections has opposed the proposal, saying it would create leper colonies within the prison system.

Just Bury 'em
In the late 1980s, Florida's Broward County (which includes Fort Lauderdale) leapt to the vanguard of the war on AIDS when county medical examiner, Dr. Ronald K. Wright, ordered that—barring family objections—autopsies would be performed on every person who died of AIDS. Wright hoped that the autopsies would help in the collection of information about the disease , and he was widely lauded for his foresight. But The Miami Herald reports that Wright's successor as medical examiner, Dr. Joshua L. Perper, upon recently taking office, discontinued the practice. Perper claimed that about 3,000 autopsies were performed over the past five years at a cost to Broward County of more than $1 million and that information gathered in the process was not adequately organized and analyzed. The Herald noted that a study by Wright in the mid '80s alerted researchers to the widespread presence of cytomegalovirus (CMV) in the tissues of people killed by AIDS—before doctors had begun to see CMV infection as a major opportunistic infection in people with AIDS who were living longer.

Cut Me

A University of Washington study has recently suggested that uncircumcised gay men are twice as likely to become infected with HIV as those who are circumcised, as reported in American Health magazine. Researchers in the study were unsure as to the possible reason for the increased risk but speculated either that he foreskin may provide an entry point for the virus or that it may simply allow for prolonged contact with infected secretions. Four out of five adult men in America are circumcised but, given doubts about whether circumcision provides any real health benefits, the procedure has been conducted less frequently in recent years.

Thalidomide, baby

Researchers at Rockefeller University in New York City have reported that thalidomide, a drug notorious for causing serious birth defects in children born to mothers who took it as a sleeping aid in Europe in the 1950's and '60s, has shown promise in the treatment of AIDS. American Health magazine reports that the researchers have determined that thalidomide inhibits the production of tumor necrosis factor (TNF), a protein involved in immune system regulation. TNF stimulates the production of HIV in infected cells. Studies abroad have shown that PWAs gain weight when given thalidomide and the Rockefeller researchers are conducting trials to see if the drug affects other AIDS symptoms.

Topo-GREED-gio

Researchers at Harvard's Dana-Farber Institute have found that, in the test tube, the experimental anticancer drug topotecan is a potent inhibitor of HIV replication. GMHC's Treatment Issues reports that Dana-Farber recently filed a use patent for topotecan in HIV applications, although general rights to the drug are owned by its manufacturer, SmithKline Beecham. In response, SmithKline has refused to negotiate any agreemen with Dana-Farber, has stopped supplying topotecan for any HIV research and is insisting that all future topotecan trials for whatever purpose exclude anyone who tests HIV positive. SmithKline's embargo has reportedly already held-up one prominent researcher's trial of topotecan in HIV positive people with lymphoma.

Magic Bullet

The country was shocked recently when a playground shooting in Butte, Montana left an 11-year-old boy dead and a 10-year-old accused of the crime. Even more shocking was the possible motive, as reported in the Montana Standard. A close friend of the accused boy's family said the boy was angry and agitated after being taunted by schoolmates because of his mother's medical condition. The boy's mother has AIDS.

AIDS Field Trips

Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry has announced plans for what they believe will be the first ever permanent museum installation about AIDS. Scheduled to open next March, the exhibit will be aimed at children aged 9 to 12 and will cover prevention (including sexual behavior, abstinence and condom use), follow the latest scientific advances in the study of the disease and show the people with AIDS can lead productive lives.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/gazette-august-september-1994-25505-8912