Johns Hopkins Awarded $8 Million for HIV Eradication Research

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The National Institutes of Mental Health have awarded $8 million to researchers at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore to develop methods to fully eradicate HIV from the body and the nervous system.

“We have developed a model that mimics what is observed in HIV-infected patients on [ARVs] and plan to use it to better understand how HIV infection causes nervous system problems,” said study leader Janice Clements, PhD, professor of comparative and molecular pathobiology at Johns Hopkins.

The research team has already developed a model of antiretroviral (ARV) therapy based on SIV—a simian cousin of HIV—that uses four drugs to reduce viral load to undetectable levels in the bloodstream and spinal fluids. Researchers will use that model to determine the best time to start ARV treatment to protect the immune and central nervous system from HIV-related damage, the amount of peripheral nervous system damage caused by ARV treatment and whether new drug therapies can rid tissues of residual virus.

ARV therapy “is not a solution to the AIDS epidemic—it is only a step toward eradication,” said Robert Siliciano, MD, PhD, a professor of medicine whose lab is part of the research. “Our next challenge is to find a way to purge the body of infection and clear the reservoirs of virus from the deepest recesses of the body, including the brain.”

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