Lymphoma Drug Wakes Up Dormant HIV

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A drug approved to treat lymphoma, Zolinza (vorinostat, SAHA) can wake up CD4 cells latently infected with HIV and render them vulnerable to antiretroviral (ARV) medication, according to a study published in the *Journal of Biological Chemistry* and reported by EurekAlert. Activating these dormant cells is a goal for researchers who hope to find ways to either eradicate the virus or help the body control HIV infection without ARV therapy.

Scientists have experimented with several different drugs to try to wake up dormant infected cells, but the compounds used were either ineffective or too toxic. Matija Peterlin, MD, and Xavier Contreras, PhD, from the University of California in San Francisco and their colleagues had previously identified a promising drug called HMBA, but they had to discard it due to likely toxicity. A related drug, Zolinza, however, is already approved for lymphoma and has a well-known side effects profile.

Peterlin, Contreras and their colleagues found that Zolinza was able to wake up dormant cells, both in laboratory cell cultures and in blood taken from people on ARV medication. The next step will be to explore the treatment in people on ARV therapy.

Zolinza's most serious side effects can include blood clots in the legs and lungs, diabetes, fewer platelets and red blood cells and dehydration from nausea and vomiting. The drug, however, would likely be used in HIV patients only for short periods of time.

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