Oregon Scientists Get $25M for Vaccine to Prevent and Cure HIV

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Oregon Health & Science University (OSHU) has received a $25 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for HIV vaccine research, according to an OSHU statement. The vaccine candidate being researched at OSHU by a team led by Louis Picker, MD, may eventually both prevent HIV infection and cure people of the virus.

In 2013, the OSHU team published findings in the journal Nature that were considered a potential breakthrough in HIV vaccine research. They created a vaccine by engineering the cytomegalovirus (CMV), which is a common virus found in most humans and primates, to express simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV) proteins.

After vaccinating 16 rhesus macaque monkeys, the scientists then infected them with a highly aggressive form of SIV, which is an AIDS-causing primate cousin of HIV. Nine of the monkeys cleared the virus. The vaccine succeeded in prompting a sustained immune response from “effective memory” T-cells, or CD8 cells, that kill SIV-infected cells.

The Gates grant will help fund a Phase I clinical trial to test the safety of a prototype human version of the vaccine in people. The grant also will help fund the development of an optimized version of the vaccine for larger scale efficacy testing. This grant is primarily focused on prevention, but the same technology will apply for a cure.

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