$17.5M HIV Grant Aims to Create PrEP Implants That Last a Year

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A group of 15 researchers and clinical investigators at Northwestern University received a $17.5 million grant to develop an implant capable of delivering meds that protect against HIV, according to a press release from the McCormick School of Engineering. The hope is that the implants would last for up to a year.

The five-year project is underwritten by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, which is part of the National Institutes of Health. It brings together researchers from 15 different departments at Northwestern, including Feinberg School of Medicine, Kellogg School of Management and McCormick School of Engineering.

The researchers are eyeing an investigational antiretroviral med called cabotegravir.

Currently, only one form of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) has been approved by the Food and Drug Administration: the daily pill Truvada, which comprises two HIV meds: tenofovir and emtricitabine.

“Long-acting systems have the great advantage of not requiring repeated modification of behavior,” said Patrick Kiser, PhD, an associate professor of biomedical engineering at McCormick, in the release. “With implants or injectable systems that deliver antiretroviral drugs, a person no longer has to worry about contracting HIV for a relatively long period of time.”

Primary investigators of the project are Kiser and Thomas Hope, PhD, a professor in cell and molecular biology.

In the first stage of the project, researchers hope to develop implants that deliver HIV meds in a controlled way. As Kiser noted: “Technology like this could be an important tool in fighting the global HIV/AIDS pandemic in the U.S. and in low-income countries.”