AIDS Researchers Redirect Vaccine Focus

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At AIDS Vaccine 2008—a weeklong conference beginning October 13 in Cape Town, South Africa—HIV researchers will propose shifting vaccine efforts away from human clinical trials to small-scale laboratory work, Reuters reports.

Experts hope the shift will put more focus on discovering "neutralizing antibodies," which strengthen the body's immune response to block HIV infection altogether.

According to the article, the push arrives after a string of disappointments in trying to create vaccines that manage HIV infection after it occurs. That research model uses large human clinical trials, and some advocates and scientist worry that the shift will shrink the funding for such trials.

"There's no guarantee that basic researchers are going to come up with the answers," said Lynn Morris, DPhil, head of the AIDS unit at South Africa's National Institute for Communicable Diseases. "But I feel quite strongly that clinical research should continue. If people are willing to participate in this because there is a hope that we may develop a vaccine, then that's what I think we should be doing."

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