Viral Suppression Without Drugs?

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Fourteen French people who started treatment within two months of contracting HIV have all kept their virus under control after stopping antiretroviral (ARV) therapy, achieving what researchers are calling a “viral remission.” The 10 men and four women were treated for between one and 7.6 years, with a median length of three years. They have remained off therapy for between four and 9.6 years. Eleven of them have maintained viral loads below 50 (considered undetectable) and three below 400.

Adding another layer to the increasingly detailed argument supporting the benefits of early therapy, the French investigators estimate that perhaps as many as 15 percent of people who begin HIV treatment shortly after infection may also experience such viral remission if they eventually stop taking ARVs.

While public perception has suggested that each of these cases is an example of a “functional cure”—implying the virus has been all but eradicated, and permanently so—the French investigators were more measured in their assessment at this point.

“This is proof of principle that we can induce this state of HIV remission in a group of patients who were not predisposed to do so naturally,” says the study’s lead author, Asier Sáez-Cirión, PhD, of the Institut Pasteur in Paris.

His team is participating in a new clinical trial to study how two years of a pair of differing ARV regimens will impact the viral reservoir and the control of infection after a treatment interruption.

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