

HEALTH

UNLOCKING THE MYSTERY RESEARCH MAY EXPLAIN HIGH RATE OF BLACK HEART DISEASE

New research presented this summer may help unlock the mysteries of why African Americans are more vulnerable to heart disease.

A team of Georgia researchers, presenting their findings at the recent Ninth International Interdisciplinary Conference on Hypertension in Blacks, said observations of blood vessel tissue indicate that the vessels of blacks are less flexible and expandable than those of whites. This is the first study to directly examine blood vessels for racial differences and may explain why African Americans have a higher rate of hypertension (high blood pressure) and higher rates of cardiovascular disease deaths than whites.

High blood pressure, often called the "silent

killer," is a leading risk factor for heart attack, stroke, kidney disease and hardening of the arteries. Heart disease and stroke are the leading causes of death among blacks, together accounting for 36 percent of all deaths each year. Compared to whites, blacks have a 25 percent higher death rate from cardiovascular disease.

Dr. Elijah Saunders, of the University of Maryland Medical School, is an expert on hypertension in blacks, having written and lectured extensively on the subject. Dr. Saunders, co-founder of the International Society on Hypertension in Blacks, says the new research could prove significant, but more studies are necessary.

Doctors Test AIDS Relief Medicine In Cameroon

By Vincent Tsas

YAOUNDE, Cameroon, (Reuter) - Doctors in the west African state of Cameroon are testing a drug to combat infections that kill AIDS sufferers but which is much cheaper than current market leader AZT, according to doctors associated with the project.

Doctor Antoine Siboulet said a group of researchers from Toulouse in southwest France had discovered two years ago that injecting the drug, which is known as FM-84 and is chemically related to bleach, produced results similar to those of AZT.

"Out of 30 patients with AIDS and generally at an advanced stage, we have noticed a reduction of clinical symptoms in more than 70 percent of the patients," he told Reuters in Yaounde Friday.

"This reduction has persisted after more than 20 months among the first cases," he added.

Siboulet, a specialist on sexually transmitted and tropical diseases, said the product was now in the fourth and final stage of testing.

He did not elaborate but he said FM-84 would be about five times cheaper to produce than AZT.

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) kills by destroying the body's natural immunity to disease.

Siboulet declined to name the French researchers but said they had chosen an Irish company to develop and test their product. That company had asked him to find them a place in Africa where testing could be carried out.

Siboulet phoned Cameroonian army Col. Dr. Eitel Mpoudi Ngole, a friend, who told him tests could start at once.

They began in March 1993 with 30 AIDS patients in Yaounde.

Ngole told Reuters the new drug was chemically related to bleach. "It's quaternary ammonium, the formula for which is related to bleach. The advance is that it is an injectable disinfectant," he said.

The colonel said in earlier comments carried by the local press that the drug, administered

by injection or orally, had cured diarrhea and fever and eased tuberculosis.

He said some side effects such as abscesses had been observed after injecting the drug but attributed this to poor storage. When stored in a glass bottle instead of in a plastic container, the side effects reduced drastically, he added.

The colonel told Reuters tests would start next month on 100 AIDS patients in five hospitals in Yaounde. He said FM-84 would be administered with so-called superactivated antibiotics.

Siboulet acknowledged that testing in Africa raised ethical issues, particularly as it took at least a year to obtain testing permission in Europe.

"I have been asked whether this is acceptable from an ethical point of view," he said, but he added: "Either you have a product to help those who are sick or nothing at all. There is no alternative."

No cure, but 1/3 survive cancer, survey shows

By Abigail Schmelz

STOCKHOLM, Sweden (Reuter) - Although scientists still appear to be far from finding a cure, around one-third of cancer sufferers will beat the disease, according to a newly published, 30-year-long Swedish study involving 800,000 cancer patients.

Some forms of cancer — like liver, lung and stomach cancer — have an extremely low survival rate, while the chances of living through breast cancer, prostate cancer, Hodgkin's disease, testicle cancer and acute leukemia in children have increased.

The report, entitled "Cancer Survival in Sweden in 1961-91," and produced by the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, said survival rates improved the most sharply in the 1970s.

The board said the survey was one of the most comprehensive statistical surveys of cancer survival rates ever carried out.

"Treatment against cancer has improved, but in most cases has not provided a radical breakthrough in survival statistics," the study reported.

"Of the 36,000 people diagnosed with cancer in 1982, around 10,000 were alive 10 years later. Around one quarter of these — 2,530 people — would not have been alive 10 years later if they had got their cancer in 1962 rather than 1982," the report said to portray progress in fighting the disease.

Prevention is still the only realistic means of battling cancer and a cure is not yet on the horizon, it said. "Cancer prevention remains, in light of these statistics, as the most essential method of preventing early deaths from cancer."

Women have a better chance

of surviving cancer, according to the study, which showed that 51 percent of women diagnosed with some form of cancer between 1980 and 1982 were still alive 10 years later.

Some 38 percent of men were still alive after the 10-year period.

"There can be several explanations. One can be that women in general are younger when diagnosed and another may be that women on average get less serious forms of cancer.

"We can, however, see in statistics that women have a better survival rates from all types of cancer," the study added. Women also appeared to be better informed about cancer and were being diagnosed at an earlier stage than men.

The study said it was sometimes stated that around half of cancer patients were cured. "The survey shows that the figure is more close to one-third."

The study reported survival chances from malignant melanoma, a form of skin cancer often associated with exposure to the sun, are now 69 percent for men and 81 percent for women, an average improvement of 25 percentage

points.

In many parts of the world, massive education programs have encouraged people — especially children — to cover up against sun rays that researchers say can cause skin cancer.


A woman's chances of surviving breast cancer have increased from 52 percent to 66 percent during the study period mainly because of earlier detection of the disease.

Men have also benefited from improvements in diagnostic technology for prostate cancer — 42 percent will survive the disease today compared to 25 percent 30 years ago.

The surveys showed, however, that only between 1 percent and 2 percent of people survive liver cancer, between 7 percent and 9 percent beat lung cancer and 5 percent beat stomach cancer.

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