

# Study Shows Success With New AIDS Drug

LONDON - British researchers reported Friday that a new type of AIDS drug seemed to work well in fighting HIV, the virus that causes the deadly syndrome.

Dr. Valerie Kitchen and colleagues tested saquinavir, the first of a family of drugs known as protease inhibitors, which target a specific enzyme that helps the virus replicate itself.

In 44 HIV-positive men who had never been treated with any other drug before, saquinavir boosted their immune systems and caused levels of the virus to

fall, Kitchen reported in the *Lancet Medical Journal*.

Her findings seemed to support other studies that show protease or proteinase inhibitors work well against the virus. The drugs are a major new hope for several pharmaceutical companies trying to find treatments for AIDS.

But earlier tests using several protease inhibitors on four HIV patients showed that the virus, which initially was strongly affected by the drug, recovered to almost its original strength after several months.

## New Version Of Prostate Cancer Test More Accurate

LAS VEGAS - A new version of the PSA prostate cancer test seems more accurate and should reduce the number of biopsies performed, according to new research presented on Tuesday.

Dr. William Catalona, a urologic surgeon at Washington University School of Medicine, reported his findings at the American Urological Association meeting in Las Vegas.

The blood test measures PSA (prostate specific antigen), a protein produced by the prostate. High levels may indicate cancer but the findings must be confirmed by a biopsy.

In two out of three cases, the patient turns out not to have cancer.

A more accurate test would have fewer "false positives" and would thus cut back sharply on the need for biopsies, which cost about \$1,200 each.

Catalona said the new test, still experimental, can measure a free-floating form of PSA, which in turn can help determine whether the problem is cancer or a noncancerous condition called benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH).

The hardest diagnostic problem with the current test is for men with slightly elevated

PSA levels. Even though many will turn out to be cancer-free, doctors are hesitant to ignore the warning sign because prostate cancer is more easily cured if caught at an early stage.

"This group really poses a diagnostic dilemma for doctors," Catalona said.

Catalona's study evaluated the new test in frozen blood samples of 113 men over age 50 who had undergone various traditional tests and examinations, including biopsies.

Sixty-three of them had BPH and 50 had prostate cancer. Catalona estimated that the new test would have eliminated 76 per cent of the unnecessary biopsies in men with normal-sized prostates, and 38 per cent in those with enlarged prostates, often a sign of BPH.

Prostate cancer is the second leading cancer in men in the United States. The American Cancer Society predicts it will strike 244,000 American men this year and kill 40,400.

Urologists recommend that men over age 50 get an annual PSA test.

Kitchen was unavailable for comment on the negative findings, which were published in the *Science Journal Nature* last week.

She and her team gave the 44 patients varying doses of saquinavir, manufactured as Invirase by Hoffmann-La Roche.

After four weeks, levels of the virus dropped in all the groups and the higher the dose, the

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bigger the drop. But levels recovered, at different rates, in all the groups by 16 weeks.

Numbers of CD4 cells, immune system cells often measured to assess AIDS, increased at all doses and the best effect was seen at the highest dose.

"No serious adverse events occurred," Kitchen wrote.

"Saquinavir was well tolerated in this group of previously untreated patients with few or no symptoms."

James Lipsky, a pharmacologist at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., said the findings were important.

Many scientists are working on "cocktails" of drugs to treat HIV, using standard therapy such

as AZT (Burroughs Wellcome's zidovudine) combined with protease inhibitors.

"Combination chemotherapy may well be necessary to combat HIV infection," Lipsky said.

"Although saquinavir and other proteinase inhibitors have not eradicated HIV, these studies point the way to more effective therapies," he added.

## Research Provides Hope for an Alzheimer's Cure

By Larry Lucas

Almost everybody knows at least one family that's been touched by the tragedy of Alzheimer's Disease. There are about 4 million Americans suffering from Alzheimer's today.

This progressive disease usually begins with a decrease in attention span, loss of concentration and forgetfulness. As the disease gets worse, patients have difficulty carrying out their normal activities. Ultimately, there is severe memory loss, complete disorientation, social withdrawal and loss of independence. Alzheimer's has been aptly described as the "death of the mind."

Fortunately, America's pharmaceutical research firms are looking for cures. One drug—tacrine—has already been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for Alzheimer's. This medicine has been shown to help many Alzheimer's patients. It is not a cure, but to many families of Alzheimer's patients, it's a real godsend.

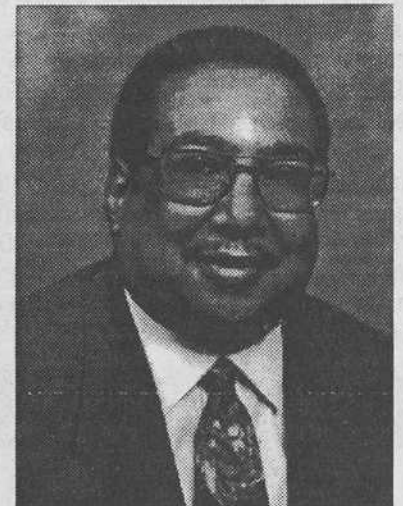
One such family was that of Jane Wirsig, who began showing signs of the disease when she was

only 60. One evening, while working on the family budget, she looked up and said, "I must be losing my mind—I've forgotten how to add."

Jane's husband, Woodrow, wrote a book entitled "I Love You, Too!" It's about his struggle to get tacrine for Jane before the drug had been approved by the FDA. And it's about how the drug helped ease the symptoms of Alzheimer's and, in Mr. Wirsig's words, "helped Jane have a little more time to live a little more normally."

Drug companies are now developing 22 additional medicines for Alzheimer's—including several that show promise in slowing the progression of the disease. All of these drugs are currently being tested in patients in supervised clinical trials in leading hospitals.

If just one of these potential medicines proves safe and effective and wins FDA approval, the benefits both to individual families and to the healthcare system will be enormous. More than half of all nursing home patients are victims of Alzheimer's or a related disorder. The disease costs society more than \$90 billion a year, and more than 14 million Americans



will have the disease by the year 2050 unless a cure or a means of prevention is found. The research currently underway at America's pharmaceutical companies provides the best hope that a cure will be found.

For a free copy of "New Medicines in Development for Neurologic Disorders," write to PhRMA, 1100 15th Street NW, Washington, DC 20005.

Larry Lucas is Associate Vice President of the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America.

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