

HEALTH

Short-course AZT regimen reduces perinatal HIV transmission

Offers hope for reducing mother-child HIV transmission in 3rd world

Special to Sentinel-Voice

In an announcement that has important implications for many developing nations, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Monday that a short course of AZT given late in pregnancy and during delivery reduced the rate of HIV transmission to infants of infected mothers by half and is safe for use in the developing world.

The Ministry of Public Health of Thailand, which conducted the study in collaboration with CDC, announced the results Monday in Thailand.

The findings, from a preliminary analysis of data from the CDC/MOPH collaborative study, offer real hope to many developing nations that previously had no realistic therapy options to

prevent HIV-infected pregnant women from transmitting infection to their babies.

"We are very fortunate in the U.S. and Europe to have been in a position to offer preventive therapy to HIV-infected pregnant women for several years, and thousands of infections in infants have been prevented as a direct result," Health and Human Services Secretary Donna E. Shalala said. "Now we are a step closer to seeing the kind of progress that we've made at home extended to the developing world."

Prior to these findings, the only AZT regimen proven effective for perinatal HIV prevention was essentially out of reach for the countries in which over 90 percent of HIV infections occur.

The AZT regimen used in the United States is costly and requires several months of treatment

for the mother and the infant and an intravenous dose that is not feasible in many developing countries.

In order for policy makers in developing nations to provide HIV-infected women a preventive therapy, they urgently needed conclusive scientific evidence that there is a practical treatment regimen that is safe and more effective than what they have been able to provide, which, tragically for most, has been no preventive therapy at all.

"By using a much shorter course during pregnancy, an oral dose rather than an intravenous dose during delivery, and no infant dose, we evaluated a regimen that could be realistically implemented in developing nations," said Dr. Helene Gayle, director of

CDC's National Center for HIV, STD, and TB Prevention. "Now that the regimen has been proven safe and effective in Thailand, these findings offer hope of extending perinatal prevention to HIV-infected women throughout the developing world."

The Thailand study was one of two CDC collaborative perinatal HIV prevention studies. The CDC studies, conducted with the Ministries of Health in Bangkok, Thailand and Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, were part of an international collaborative research effort coordinated by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS to help identify practical solutions for the developing world.

The Thailand study, which began enrollment (See AZT regimen, Page 16)

Test probes heart

Special to Sentinel-Voice

HOUSTON — A new blood test that measures "sticky" molecules to predict heart attack has been discovered.

Researchers at the DeBakey Heart Center of Baylor College of Medicine and the Methodist Hospital in Houston measured molecular levels which are important in inflammation. The molecules caused the white blood cell to "stick" to the arteries, which may lead to coronary artery disease and heart attack.

"This test may help determine who is at risk for heart disease before a heart attack or stroke occurs," said Dr. Christine Ballantyne, Baylor associate professor of medicine and co-director of the Lipid Research Clinic at Methodist.

The test was studied in the Atherosclerosis Risk in the Community (ARIC) study, funded by the National Institutes of Health. ARIC followed more than 15,000 men and women in four U.S. multiethnic communities who were checked for coronary artery disease, a leading cause of heart attack.

Study participants who developed heart disease or carotid artery disease had higher levels of the "sticky" molecules. Ballantyne hopes the recent findings will offer better ways to diagnose and treat heart ailments.

Ballantyne said more research is needed to refine the test.

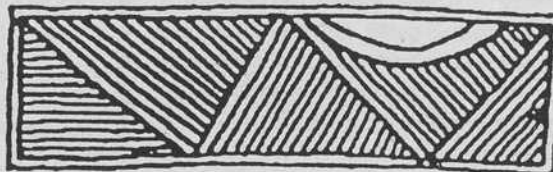
The DeBakey Heart Center is a joint program of Baylor College of Medicine and the Methodist Hospital supporting cardiovascular research, treatment and education.

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