

News and treatments briefs

Created 22 Mar 2007 - 12:06am

News briefs

SA case claims HIV doesn't exist

The South Australian Supreme Court has been told that an HIV-positive man convicted last year for endangering the lives of three women with whom he had unprotected sex should be released because the HIV [virus](#) [1]A small infective organism which is incapable of reproducing outside a host cell. does not exist. Andre Chad Parenzee, 36, is appealing against his conviction and has called a series of witnesses from the so-called 'Perth group', who have argued in court that the virus has never been isolated in the laboratory and cannot be sexually transmitted. A series of Australian and international experts have been called to the witness box to respond to the claims, including Professor Robert Gallo, co-discoverer of HIV, who gave evidence via a video link, describing the claims that the disease does not exist as "hogwash."

Abbott withdraws from Thailand over patent dispute

Abbott Laboratories, the manufacturer of Kaletra, has said it will no longer seek licences to market its products in Thailand after the Thai government announced it would issue a compulsory license overriding the Kaletra patent. The Thai government, which provides low-cost HIV treatment to its citizens, said it needed to issue to compulsory license to allow the import of a low-cost generic version of Kaletra from India. Abbott had previously agreed to cut the price of its product but after the Thai action said it would not introduce new medicines there.

AIDS could decimate PNG's workforce: report

AIDS could kill more than one-third of the adult population of Papua New Guinea within 20 years unless action is taken to curb the epidemic, according to a report by Australia's Centre for Independent Studies. The report also says that young women are being targeted by superstitious Papuans who believe witchcraft is responsible for AIDS-related deaths – an estimated 500 women have been attacked in the last year in response to accusations of sorcery. Around 2 percent of PNG's population is thought to be HIV-positive, but that could rise to 18 percent by 2010 and 25 percent by 2020, the report says.

Vaccine trial begins in S Africa

A large-scale trial of a possible HIV vaccine has begun in South Africa. Three thousand sexually active HIV-negative people will participate in the trial, which is testing a vaccine candidate developed by the drug company Merck. The Merck vaccine has previously undergone safety trials in several countries, including Australia, however this is the first large-scale trial.

AIDS activist's 'genocide' charge

South African AIDS activist and founder of the Treatment Action Campaign, Zackie Achmat, has become the target of a bizarre charge of genocide launched by Anthony Brink, the head of a rival organisation that claims that HIV treatments are poisonous. In a rambling 59-page indictment filed with the International Criminal Court, Brink accuses Achmat of causing the deaths of thousands of South Africans by advocating for HIV treatments. Achmat, who has previously been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for his work, refused to comment on the action, but a TAC statement said "We are ignoring it because we're dealing with more important tasks."

Treatments briefs

Selenium cuts [viral load](#) [2]A measurement of the quantity of HIV RNA in the blood. Viral load blood test results are expressed as the number of copies (of HIV) per milliliter of blood plasma., boosts CD4s in study

A [randomised trial](#) [3]A clinical trial in which participants are randomly (i.e., by chance) assigned to one of two or more treatment arms of a clinical trial. has found the dietary supplement selenium stabilises viral loads and modestly boosts CD4 counts. The study [enrolled](#) [4]The act of signing up participants into a study. Generally this process involves evaluating a participant with respect to the eligibility criteria of the study and going through the informed consent process. 262 HIV-positive volunteers, three-quarters of whom were on treatments at the start of the study. Participants were [randomised](#) [5]A method based on chance by which study participants are assigned to a treatment group. Randomization minimizes the differences among groups by equally distributing people with particular characteristics among all the trial arms. The researchers do not know which treatment is better. From what is known at the time, any one of the treatments chosen could be of benefit to the participant to receive either 200 micrograms of selenium daily or a [placebo](#) [6]A dummy medical treatment, designed to have no pharmacological effect, administered to the control group of a clinical trial.. After nine months, participants in the selenium group had small increases in CD4 count and had decreased or stable viral loads. While the precise mechanism by which selenium concentrations affect CD4 counts and viral loads is unknown, the researchers say their results show further study is warranted. —Aidsmap

Valproic acid ‘cure’ debunked

A drug that was thought to offer the possibility of eliminating HIV from the body does no such thing, according to US researchers. A 2005 study had suggested that the anti-epilepsy drug valproic acid could stimulate HIV to leave viral reservoirs where it was out of the reach of treatments, depleting the body’s store of ‘dormant’ virus. Researchers at Johns Hopkins University measured the amount of hidden HIV in nine patients who were also taking valproic acid for non-HIV conditions, and found no measurable decrease in the amount of resting HIV. —The Advocate

Disclose your HIV status, increase your CD4 count?

People with HIV who are open about their HIV status and sexual orientation have significantly higher CD4 counts than those who don’t, according to US research. The study involved 373 people with HIV who were treated as outpatients at a psychiatric clinic in Seattle between 2000 and 2004. Researchers found a statistically significant correlation between disclosure of HIV status, disclosure of sexuality, and higher CD4 counts. While the findings do suggest that people who don’t conceal their status have better health outcomes, the researchers warn that it would be “premature to suggest that individuals should disclose sexual orientation and HIV status in order to be healthier”, particularly as there is evidence from earlier studies to shown that concealment can be protective for gay men who fear rejection. —Aidsmap

Maturation inhibitor struggles

Early results from a phase-2 study of the maturation inhibitor bevirimat (PA-457) have proven disappointing, with blood levels of the drug lower than expected in trial participants. Bevirimat is the first of a new class of [antivirals](#) [7]

Improved [resistance](#) [9]HIV which has mutated and is less susceptible to the effects of one or more anti-HIV drugs is said to be resistant. test is 1000 times more sensitive

Researchers at Duke University in the US have developed a resistance test that is much more sensitive than existing assays. The test may be capable of detecting low-level ‘archived’ resistance which is outside the reach of other resistance tests, or detect drug resistance that was acquired at the time of HIV transmission but which had faded away to low levels by the time treatment was begun. —Aidsmap, BBC

- [bevirimat \(MPC-4326, PA-457\)](#)
- [complementary and alternative therapies](#)
- [disclosure](#)
- [nutrition](#)
- [preventative vaccines](#)
- [resistance tests](#)

Links:

- [1] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/125>
- [2] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/416>
- [3] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/514>
- [4] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/489>
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