

## National Notes

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and their colleagues found that interleukin-2 (IL-2) boosted levels of CD4+ T cells in some patients for more than two years, a far longer time than typically seen with currently available anti-HIV drugs.

"This study provides the strongest evidence so far that it may be possible to rebuild and maintain the damaged immune systems of HIV-infected individuals," said Dr. Lane. "Ongoing studies of intermittent infusions of IL-2 will determine whether the increases in CD4+ T cell counts seen in this trial will translate into clinical benefits."

In the NIAID study, patients received IL-2 intravenously for five consecutive days every two months. All participants took at least one approved antiretroviral drug such as AZT or ddI during the study. T cell measurements were made one and two months after each course of IL-2.

In six of 10 patients who started the study with T cell counts higher than 200 per cubic millimeter (mm<sup>3</sup>) of blood, T cell counts rose by more than 50 percent after 12 months. The remaining four had stable T cell counts or showed a slight decline.

Of the 15 patients who started the study with T cell counts below 200/mm<sup>3</sup>, only two showed a 50 percent increase in their T cell count. In the remaining 13, no significant increases in T cell counts were observed, and side effects were considerably more severe than in the patients with baseline T cell counts above 200/mm<sup>3</sup>.

In several patients, the rise in T cells was dramatic — for example, one individual's T cell count rose from 554 to 1,993 cells/mm<sup>3</sup> after 12 months on IL-2. A healthy person usually has 800 to 1,200 T cells/mm<sup>3</sup>.

"Although current anti-HIV drugs have transient benefits, especially for individuals in late-stage disease, they do not prevent the immunologic deterioration associated with HIV disease," said Dr. Lane. "It is increasingly evident that preservation and restoration of the immune systems of HIV-infected people are necessary if they are to live for longer periods of time. This study shows that IL-2 may help accomplish this. We believe the principles established here for augmentation of the T helper cell limb of the immune

system might also benefit patients with other diseases characterized by decreased T cell function."

IL-2, originally called T cell-growth factor, is produced in the body by T cells and has potent effects on the proliferation and differentiation of a number of immune cells, including T cells, B cells and natural killer cells. Commercially, IL-2 is produced by recombinant DNA technology and is licensed for the treatment of metastatic renal cell cancer.

### MT kills gay registration bill

The Montana Senate has reversed itself on an anti-gay vote it held March 21, which would have equated gays and lesbians with murderers and rapists under state law, and would have required those convicted under the state's sodomy law to register for life with the police. Republican Governor Marc Racicot had promised to line-item veto the provision.

"We were assured that Governor Racicot would put a stop to this outrageous bill," said Richard Tafel, executive director of Log Cabin Republicans, the nation's largest lesbian and gay Republican organization. "The Senate reversed itself because it had no choice."

Log Cabin Republicans had condemned the Senate vote approving the law, calling it "big government at its most dangerous," and had coordinated a national grass-roots response to protest its passage. Tafel credited Racicot with being a voice of reason.

"The Governor saw how unreasonable this bill was and made his feelings known," Tafel said. "We should continue to work to educate our leaders so that we can avoid legislation like this in the future."

"This bill is a frightening example of the insidious dangers of sodomy laws," said Robin Kane of the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force. "Sodomy laws, even when not fully enforced, classify all gay men and lesbians as criminals and are used as weapons in public debate. Our criminal status under these laws is cited as justification for policies that deny us our rights and dignity. This effort to have gay men and lesbians register with police officials is an unprecedented backlash against our movement for equality."

Currently 22 states have laws barring sodomy. Six states, including Montana, bar only homosexual sodomy.

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