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Special Instructions

Stem Cell Transplant Renders Man Clear of HIV

Approximately [1.1 million people](#) were living with HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) at the end of 2015; 15 percent of them had no idea they'd been infected. Statistically speaking, those who started antiretroviral treatment early could expect to live a long life despite their HIV diagnosis, but they would never be cured. A cure may be on the horizon, though. One man with an AIDS diagnosis has entered remission after a bone marrow transplant performed in Britain.

Quick Read:

Two men infected with HIV have been “functionally cured” of the virus following bone marrow transplants in Germany and Britain. These cases are giving researchers hope that a cure for HIV and AIDS may be close. However, bone marrow transplants are risky and complicated, which means they may never become a cure-all. Instead, treatment focuses on pre-exposure prophylaxis, which have a 90 percent success rate, and antiretroviral treatments, which have gifted HIV patients with normal life spans. Keep reading for more on this exciting development.

Continue reading to learn more about how stem cells are providing hope for an AIDS cure.

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The London Bone Marrow Transplant

After having been diagnosed with HIV in 2003, the London patient (as he’s being called around the world) became ill with Hodgkin’s Lymphoma, a type of blood cancer. The cancer was aggressive, leaving the patient gravely ill just four years after his HIV diagnosis. Doctors believed a [bone marrow transplant](#) using stem cells was his only hope of beating the cancer.

In 2016, he received bone marrow from a donor who possessed a genetic mutation that is known to provide resistance to HIV. Later testing showed that the London patient had no trace of the HIV virus, spurring doctors to label him as “functionally cured.”

An Earlier, Similar Case Study

The London patient is not the first person to be “functionally cured” of HIV. Timothy Brown, is also considered HIV free after receiving a similar treatment in 2007 in Germany. After more than a decade has passed with no relapse, many researchers and medical experts are hopeful that what they’ve stumbled upon is indeed a cure.

The Prognosis for HIV Treatment

Some experts are hesitant to say that either patient has been cured. Instead, they consider them in remission. This is due primarily to lack of knowledge regarding the HIV-resistant gene, CCR5 delta 32, and how it affects the HIV virus.

Regardless, experts do agree that it is not feasible to offer bone marrow transplants as a cure for HIV. The procedure is complicated and risky, making it an option only when a primary illness, such as cancer, is present.

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For now, medications to prevent and treat HIV have shown great success and will continue to be at the forefront of the battle. Pre-exposure prophylaxis prevents sexual transmission of the disease 90 percent of the time and transmission from IV drug use 70 percent of the time. What’s more, HIV treatments have increased life spans dramatically. In fact, people with HIV are more likely to die of other causes than they are of AIDS.