

Headline	Surprising monkey study could lead to functional HIV cure		
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## Surprising monkey study could lead to 'functional' HIV cure

**CHICAGO:** Dr. Anthony Fauci doesn't get too excited about the results of animal studies, and he doesn't make house calls.

But when a drug already taken by thousands of people for intestinal conditions appeared to control the monkey version of HIV, it got the attention of the director of the National Institutes of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

Fauci hopped on a plane to Cambridge, Mass., to personally tell Japan's Takeda Pharmaceutical Co's US representatives that their drug may offer a dramatic advance in the fight against AIDS.

Takeda's drug suppressed the the virus to undetectable levels in eight monkeys, some for two years. The findings raise hopes for a so-called "functional cure" - a treatment that puts the disease in sustained remission.

"The data was so dramatic," said Fauci, who has made AIDS research his life's work.

The drug is one of several promising ideas heading into early-stage human trials, all seeking to help patients control the virus that causes AIDS for extended periods without daily antiretroviral therapy (ART).

The studies build on research propelled by the case of Timothy Ray Brown, the so-called "Berlin patient," whose HIV was eradicated through an elaborate stem cell transplant in 2007.

"There has been this explosion of discovery," said Mitchell Warren, executive director of the

AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition. "There are completely new ideas that were impossible to conceive even a few years ago."

HIV once meant certain death. But, for more than half of the 36.7 million HIV patients around the world, ART transformed it into a chronic disease.

Taken daily, ART suppresses the virus. But keeping up a daily medication regimen is difficult. The drugs are expensive and toxic, causing nausea, fatigue and nerve problems in the short-term, and insulin resistance and other problems over time.

Only about a third of US patients take ART consistently enough to push the virus down to undetectable levels.

"We're going to need other approaches," said Dr. Nelson Michael, director of the US Military HIV Research Program at the Walter Reed Army Institute.

Much work has focused on the discovery of rare antibodies made by HIV patients that can neutralize several different forms of the virus.

One trial involving an antibody called PGT121 licensed by Gilead Sciences Inc reduced the virus to undetectable levels in 16 of 18 monkeys; the effect lasted for four months in three of them.

At Walter Reed, Michael is taking a different tack, testing whether a vaccine - being developed to prevent HIV infection - can fight off the virus in infected individuals. - Reuters

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**DR. Anthony Fauci**, director of the National Institutes of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, is pictured at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, U.S. November 22, 2016 in this still image from video. PHOTO: REUTERS