Some People Can Naturally Cure HIV

An Argentinian woman appears to have been naturally “cured” of HIV despite not being on medication, according to scientists who hailed the case as a “rare” hope for the nearly 38 million people infected with the virus.

The 30-year-old mom has been dubbed the “Esperanza patient” after the town where she lives — and whose name fittingly means “hope.”

The patient was diagnosed with HIV in 2013, according to research published Monday in the “Annals of Internal Medicine.”

She never felt sick or took medication, and a battery of recent tests did not find the virus, “despite analysis of massive numbers of cells from blood and tissues,” the study said.

The findings suggest “that this patient may have naturally achieved a sterilizing cure of HIV-1 infection,” the co-authors wrote.

“These observations raise the possibility that a sterilizing cure may be an extremely rare but possible outcome of HIV-1 infection,” the study concluded.

One of the study’s co-authors, Dr. Xu Yu of the Ragon Institute in Boston, told NBC News, “This is really the miracle of the human immune system that did it.

“This gives us hope that the human immune system is powerful enough to control HIV and eliminate all the functional virus,” Yu added to the Boston Globe. “Time will tell, but we believe she has reached a sterilizing cure.”

Dr. Xu Yu, one of the study’s co-authors, called the development a “miracle.” Ragon Institute of MGH, MIT, and Harvard

The patient’s case was similar to that of Loreen Willenberg, a 67-year-old California woman who also appeared to have cured herself despite not using antiretroviral drugs in the three decades after she was infected.

The unidentified woman in Esperanza had been extensively tested by the scientists in Argentina and Boston since 2019, with no signs of the virus.
Only the presence of antibodies appeared to confirm she had, in fact, ever been infected, the study said.

Scientists hope to discover exactly what happened in both cases so the knowledge can be used for future treatments and even cures for others.

Loreen Willenberg is another example of an exceptionally rare HIV case. The patient becomes just the second documented person whose immune system
combated the deadly disease in this fashion – achieving a "sterilizing cure" without any form of stem cell transplantation.

The woman, who has been nicknamed the "Esperanza patient" for her representation of hope, provided blood samples to be analyzed from 2017 to 2020. She had 1.2 billion of her blood cells searched and 500 million placenta-tissue cells searched after she gave birth to an HIV-negative baby in March 2020.

Co-authors of the peer-reviewed study, which was published Monday in the Annals of Internal Medicine, said they believe their findings will bring hope for a long-term cure to the nearly 38 million people globally afflicted by the virus.

"Our study shows that such a cure can also be reached during natural infection – in the absence of bone marrow transplants (or any type of treatment at all)," Dr. Xu Yu, a viral immunologist at the Ragon Institute of Massachusetts General Hospital, MIT and Harvard, told CNN. "Examples of such a cure that develops naturally suggest that current efforts to find a cure for HIV infection are not elusive and that the prospects of getting to an 'AIDS-free generation' may ultimately be successful.""'

'London Patient': The second-ever person to be cured from HIV, reveals identity

Researchers noted in the study the patient has a rare "elite controller" of the virus but has received no regular treatment for eight years and shows no signs of active infection or intact virus capable of replicating.

"Why is this exciting? It suggests that some elite controllers may have gone beyond simply controlling the virus and instead have managed to eradicate it," the study read. "If the Esperanza patient has indeed achieved a sterilizing cure, defining the mechanisms responsible for it becomes important."

Researchers have cured two other people therapeutically via dangerous stem cell transplants. The only other patient in history without transplants was a 67-year-old woman from California, Loreen Willenberg, who was diagnosed with HIV in 1992.