

HHS NEWS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

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The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, an agency of the U.S. Public Health Service, awarded six new grants for the study of AIDS, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, on September 15. Funding for the grants comes from a \$12 million FY 1983 supplemental appropriation for the study of AIDS signed into law by President Reagan July 30.

The review and award processes, which ordinarily require several months, were expedited because the investigators will be studying AIDS, a deadly disease described by Health and Human Services Secretary Margaret M. Heckler as "the number one health priority of my department."

People with AIDS have defects in some parts of their immune system, which leave them vulnerable to a wide variety of opportunistic infections, such as Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia, and/or unusual tumors, such as Kaposi's sarcoma. More than 2,000 cases have been reported, primarily among homosexual men, intravenous drug abusers, recent Haitian entrants to the United States and hemophiliacs.

The six grantees are Murray B. Gardner, M.D., University of California, Davis; Norman L. Letvin, M.D., Harvard Medical School, Boston, Mass.; Victoria Monte-Wicher, Ph.D., New York State Department of Health, Albany; John L. Sullivan, M.D. University of Massachusetts, Worcester; Leonard Chess, M.D., Columbia University,

New York, N.Y.; and Sudhir Gupta, M.D., University of California, Irvine.

Within the last two years, a disease similar to AIDS has been observed in monkeys housed in two U.S. primate research centers. Dr. Gardner, in California, and Dr. Letvin, in Massachusetts, will be studying this Simian Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, called SAIDS.

Dr. Gardner will try to discover whether SAIDS is caused by a virus, another infectious agent, or some environmental factor. A major goal of the project will be to find a way to reliably induce the disease in animals so that a means of treatment and prevention can be found.

Dr. Letvin will study the immunological defect in monkeys with SAIDS and will try to isolate and identify a causative agent.

Dr. Monte-Wicher will try to clarify the mechanisms that make male homosexuals susceptible to AIDS. She will work with rabbits in studying changes in their immune responses.

Another group at high risk for AIDS, hemophiliacs, are thought to get AIDS from an infectious agent present in the blood products they need to have in order to make their blood clot. One of these products is factor VIII, which is made from blood pooled from many donors. Recent studies have shown that, apart from those with AIDS, many hemophiliacs receiving factor VIII have immune defects. Dr. Sullivan will study 240 hemophiliacs to determine if these immune defects are related to factor VIII and whether they are reversible.

Dr. Chess and Dr. Gupta will be studying blood cells called lymphocytes, which play an important role in immunity. They will analyze how various groups of lymphocytes work and interact normally and what goes awry in AIDS patients.