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Doctors: New process treats lupus

CHICAGO — Lupus, an incurable disease that turns victims' immune systems against them, has proved vulnerable to a new radical approach that destroys and then revives the body's natural defenses, doctors said Friday.

A 24-year-old woman dangerously ill with the disease shows no signs of lupus in her system two months after the treatment, said Dr. Richard Burt at Northwestern Memorial Hospital.

Heather Markel, whose condition worsened recently after 13 years of treatment with steroids and chemotherapy, is the first patient to receive the treatment, Burt said.

A medical student from Millersburg, Ohio, Markel contracted lupus when she was 11. The disease attacked her lungs, kidneys, blood and central nervous system, leaving her with failing kidneys and soaring blood pressure when she came to Northwestern in January.