

DISPATCH

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The Associated Press

Dr. Richard Burt (center), head of the allogeneic (donor) bone marrow transplant program, hugs Phyllis Young (left), as he says good-bye to Young and her daughter, Heather Markel, on Friday.

CHICAGO

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'Incurable' lupus treatment found

Six months ago, Heather Markel was dangerously ill with lupus, an incurable disease that had attacked her lungs and kidneys and forced her to rely on steroids for strength.

Now doctors who destroyed Markel's immune system and then revived it say lupus may be vulnerable to a new procedure called a stem cell transplant.

Markel, a 24-year-old medical student from Millersburg, Ohio, shows no signs of lupus in her system two months after the treatment, said Dr. Richard Burt at Northwestern Memorial Hospital. She is the first patient to undergo the procedure.

Markel contracted lupus when she was 11. The disease attacked her blood and central nervous system, leaving her with failing kidneys and soaring blood pressure when she came to Northwestern in January. Thirteen years of treatment with steroids and chemotherapy had apparently failed.

But since the transplant in April, Markel's kidneys have returned to normal, her strength is back and she has sharply lowered the amount of steroids she is taking.

"I think about what it would be like to be normal, not to take medicines," Markel said Friday. "I don't know really what it's like to not go into the hospital every time you get sick."