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Encouraging therapy for lupus

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Patient's immune system seems better

By **Brian Bergstein**
ASSOCIATED PRESS

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.

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

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 Millers-

burg, 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.

The new process takes stem cells, which grow into bone marrow cells, a foundation of the immune system, from a patient's blood and purifies them. Intense chemotherapy destroys the patient's immune

system and then the purified cells are returned to blossom and re-create the immune system.

Since the stem cell 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.

Burt and others cautioned that it is still early for a definitive evaluation since the disease is characterized by active and inactive periods.