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Radical therapy may conquer lupus

CHICAGO — ^{9492A} Lupus, an incurable disease that turns victims' immune systems against them, has proved vulnerable to a radical approach that destroys and then revives the body's natural defenses, doctors said yesterday.

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.

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.

But destroying the immune system exposes patients to other dangers, so for now only the most severely afflicted lupus patients, or about 1 percent, should receive the treatment, Burt said.