

Radical new treatment leaves lupus patient with no symptoms

CHICAGO (AP) — Lupus, an incurable disease that turns victims' immune systems against them, has proved vulnerable to a new radical approach that destroys and then re-creates 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.

Burt and others cautioned that it

is still early for a definitive answer since the disease is characterized by active and inactive periods.

The disease turns a victim's immune system against their body. The worst cases attack the joints, tissues and organs. Symptoms range from arthritis, skin lesions and fatigue to heart attacks and kidney failure.

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 recreate the immune system.