

# NEWS-GAZETTE

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## Lupus treatment showing early promise

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CHICAGO (AP) — A radical process that destroys and then revives a patient's immune system has shown early success in treating a woman with lupus, a crippling disease considered incurable, doctors said Friday.

Dr. Richard Burt at Northwestern Memorial Hospital said Heather Markel, 24, has no signs of lupus in her system two months after undergoing the treatment.

"This is much more than you would expect from a normal re-

mission," he said. But he acknowledged what other experts emphasized — that it's too early to tell whether the disease will return.

He added that because destroying the immune system exposes patients to other dangers, for now only the most severely afflicted lupus patients should receive the treatment — about one percent of people stricken with the disease.

Lupus makes a victim's immune system turn against its

own body.

The disease can be controlled with steroids and other drugs, but there is no cure.

The number of Americans with lupus is disputed. The Lupus Foundation of America, Inc. estimates more than 1.4 million people have it, but government estimates put the number at less than half that.

Markel is the first patient with active lupus to receive the treatment, Burt said. The process is also being tried on people with

multiple sclerosis and rheumatoid arthritis in several hospitals around the world, and doctors hope it may someday be successful against all three diseases.

The process involves taking stem cells, which grow into bone marrow cells, from a patient's blood and purifying them while the patient's immune system is destroyed by intense chemotherapy. The purified cells are then returned so they can blossom again to re-create the immune system.