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Lupus researchers will, then revamp vulnerable immune systems

From Wire Reports

CHICAGO — Lupus, an incurable and sometimes fatal 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, doctors said yesterday.

A 24-year-old woman dangerously ill with the disease shows no

signs of lupus 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, because the disease is characterized by active and inactive periods.

The new process takes stem cells, which grow into bone marrow cells, a foundation of the immune sys-

tem, 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.

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.