

# Doctors say radical process treated lupus

The 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, 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.

A medical student from Millersburg, 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.

Burt and others cautioned that it

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

"We're just going to have to continue to follow her," Burt said. "This is much more than you would expect from a normal remission."

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, strokes and kidney failure.

Many die from complications.

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 the purified cells are returned to blossom and recreate the immune system.