

SATURDAY
JUN 7 1997

BURRELLE'S

940
CHC.

TV

Treatment appears to help fight lupus

Radical process: Woman shows no signs of disease

CHICAGO (AP) — A radical process that destroys and then re-creates 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 remission," he said. But he acknowledged what other experts emphasized — that it's too early to tell whether the disease will return.

"We're just going to have to continue to follow her," Burt said. "But at least we have a short-term remission with no evidence of disease."

He added that because destroying the immune system exposes patients to other dangers, for now only the most severely afflicted lupus patients should re-

ceive 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.

"We are encouraged by any new treatments for lupus but we are waiting for a much wider statistical sample," said John Huber, the Lupus Foundation's executive director. "We want to be cautious of any new treatment for a disease like lupus that is characterized by periods of activity and remission."

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.



AP
Dr. Richard Burt (center) hugs Phyllis Young as he says goodbye to her and her daughter, Heather Markel, after a news conference Friday at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago.