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Dr. Richard Burt hugs Phyllis Young as her daughter, Heather Markel, looks on Friday at a news conference in Chicago.

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## Radical process shows success in the eradication of lupus

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 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."

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.

Markel, a medical student from Millersburg, Ohio, contracted lupus when she was 11. The disease attacked her lungs, kidneys, blood and central nervous system.

Doctors had moderate success treating her with steroids and chemotherapy, but she came to Northwestern in January with soaring blood pressure and failing kidneys.

Since the stem cell transplant in April, Markel's kidneys have returned to normal, her strength is back and she has sharply lowered the amount of steroids she is taking.

"I've been doing fine. I think about what it would be like to be normal, not to take medicines," Markel said. "... I don't know really what it's like to not go into the hospital every time you get sick."