

SATURDAY
JUN 7 1997BURRELLE'S590
...EDNUD
.....

Doctors: Radical process treated 'incurable' lupus

By Brian Bergstein

Associated Press writer

9692A

CHICAGO — 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 remis-

Medical news

sion," 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 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.

"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.