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Lupus victim treated by destroying all immune cells

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CHICAGO (AP) — 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 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.

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 pa-



Associated Press

Dr. Richard Burt, center, hugs Phyllis Young, left, and says good-bye to her daughter, Heather Markel, after a news conference Friday. Markel's lupus was curtailed by a new procedure.

tient's immune system and then the purified cells are returned to recreate the immune system.

The results are important, said Dr. John Klippel, clinical director

of the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases in Bethesda, Md. "One certainly looks forward to a continuation of these studies."