

AIDS drug not available for children

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rosemary Johnson finally felt healthy thanks to powerful new AIDS drugs. But she was still in torment — unable to give her sick daughter the same medicines because no one knew how they would affect children.

Since none of the three new and potent medicines revolutionizing AIDS care is yet approved for child use, pediatricians and parents have begun struggling on their own to determine safe doses — fearing that otherwise the children will die waiting as drug companies study the question.

"I looked over to my daughter and thought, 'How could I sit here and try to save my life and not my daughter's?'" Johnson, of Baltimore, angrily told government AIDS experts last week. "We are not going to let our children die without a fight."

Under a pediatrician's care, Johnson's 9-year-old now is one

of just a handful of children nationwide taking one of the new drugs. So far, she is doing well. "I want other children to have this chance," Johnson said.

Drug makers say they're working hard to get the new drugs, called protease inhibitors, to children. They have studies planned for early 1997 on everything from liquid formulas to drug "sprinkles" that parents would mix into applesauce.

The drug companies say children spit out earlier liquid formulas because they were too bitter. And the companies had problems getting the right drug absorption.

Still, "in hindsight, perhaps we should have moved forward to get some experimental data" sooner, said Dr. Miklos Salgo of Hoffman-LaRoche, maker of the first protease inhibitor, saquinavir.

The issue doesn't just touch AIDS. Eighty percent of prescription drugs are sold with no infor-

mation on how safe or effective they might be for children.

A little more than 10,000 of the nation's half a million AIDS cases have been in children and teenagers. Some 3,156 children under 13 and 1,452 teens are still alive and in need of medicine compared with tens of thousands of adults.

"AIDS kills children just like it kills adults," said Dr. Nancy Hutton of Johns Hopkins University's Children's Center. She wants drug makers to test new AIDS medicine in children as soon they test adults, changing decades of scientific practice.

Of the nine AIDS drugs sold, four of the oldest are approved for children.

The new protease inhibitors are so effective for adults that pediatricians want to use them in children. They just don't know how. The Pediatric AIDS Foundation surveyed over 950 child patients and found only 74 taking proteases.

"I had parents who said, 'Well, I'll just give my child some of mine,'" Hutton recalled.

That's dangerous, because the wrong dose can cause drug resistance. So Hutton furiously sought early data from drug makers to calculate her own doses of ritonavir, the only liquid protease sold, for six very ill children, including Johnson's 9-year-old daughter.

A few months later, all six children are doing well, although Hutton warns that she doesn't know how long the effect will last or what is the best dose.

"We are not going to let our children die without a fight."

Rosemary Johnson
Mother of an AIDS patient

Drug for congestive heart failure looks promising

DALLAS (AP) — Researchers have released more data suggesting that the drug carvedilol can greatly benefit some patients with congestive heart failure, one of the nation's biggest killers.

Four recently published studies provide new details about carvedilol's usefulness in rendering the disease "at least partially reversible," said cardiologist Michael R. Bristow, an author of three of the four studies.

The studies' overall findings were published in May in the New England Journal of Medicine. Individual findings were published in Sunday's issue of the American Heart Association journal Circulation.

Congestive heart failure causes about 36,000 deaths annually and contributes to 250,000 other deaths. Like other beta blockers, carvedilol blocks the effects of stress hormones that cause the muscle to deteriorate.

Carvedilol's maker, SmithKline Beecham PLC, helped fund the studies, as did the National Institutes of Health and other

drug companies.

The detailed data go beyond the improved patient survival rate attributed to carvedilol in the earlier report.

For example, one of the four studies published this month indicates that heart function improved more among patients who received bigger doses of carvedilol, Bristow said.

"What's new here is this basically shows that the improvement in mortality is dose-related and related to improvement in function of the heart," he said.

Researchers also found that carvedilol was more helpful in treating heart failure than metoprolol, a so-called "second-generation" beta blocker.

Cardiologist Lynne W. Stevenson of Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, who was not involved in the studies, agreed that they mark "a new approach to a therapy for heart failure."

But, she said, "We need to know more about how to use this drug and which pa-

tients will benefit. It is clear that there are some patients who will not benefit and will actually get worse when treated with carvedilol."

Indeed, an editorial published with the studies in Circulation sounded a cautionary note. Kanu Chatterjee of the University of California at San Francisco said some evidence suggests that patients with severe, unstable heart failure do not tolerate treatment with blocking agents like carvedilol. These drugs "should not be considered for treatment of severe refractory heart failure except in special circumstances," he wrote.

The Food and Drug Administration has approved carvedilol as a treatment for high blood pressure under the brand name Coreg. But SmithKline Beecham PLC doesn't want to market the drug in the United States until it is approved as a heart failure treatment.

In May, an advisory committee to the FDA recommended against allowing the drug to be promoted as a treatment for heart failure, citing incomplete data.

New species of worms named after UT professor

The tapeworms were discovered inside lizards. Professor Pianka had donated to a Los Angeles museum.

AUSTIN (AP) — Perhaps it's an honor only a zoologist can appreciate, but University of Texas professor Eric Pianka says he's happy to have a tapeworm named after him.

Pianka, whose name is shared by a lizard he discovered, learned earlier this year that colleagues in California named a tapeworm *Oochoristica pianka* in his honor.

The parasitic worms invade lizards' guts and live inside of them for years.

"They asked if I had any objection," Pianka told the Austin American-Statesman for a story Monday. "But it's really an honor."

In the early 1970s, Pianka returned from a trip to Australia with about 100 "thorny devil" lizards. He donated them to the Los Angeles County Museum.

A couple of years ago, colleagues from the museum told Pianka they discovered an unidentified species of worms in eight of the lizards. The species was named after him.

"Good biologists often get things named after them," Pianka said. "There are a lot of people here who have things named after them."

Ian Dalziel, the director of UT's Institute for Geophysics, is one of those people.

But he has never visited the mountain ridge in Antarctica that carries his name.

"Someday I should go there," he said.

Dalziel Ridge is the primary western

ridge of the Columbian Mountains.

It was named after Dalziel for research he did in its vicinity on the structure and evolution of the Scotia Arc, a loop of underwater ridges and protruding islands that link South America to Antarctica.

But mountain ridges and tapeworms are vastly different, and not just in size.

You have to be practical when naming species, Pianka said.

"Good biologists often get things named after them. There are a lot of people here who have things named after them."

Eric Pianka
University of Texas Professor

NASA Pathfinder launch delayed

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA scientists hoped Monday for no further delays in launching a Mars spacecraft carrying the first-ever interplanetary rover.

The Mars Pathfinder was to take off aboard an unmanned rocket early Monday, but rain, clouds and strong winds pushed back the launch by 24 hours.

NASA's Global Surveyor was launched in early November and is already on its way to Mars. A Russian spacecraft launched a week later plummeted from orbit.

Pathfinder should beat the slower Global Surveyor to Mars by two months, landing on July 4, 1997. Several hours after Pathfinder parachutes down, the petals on the spacecraft will unfold; a six-wheeled, 23-pound rover will come out to roam the Martian surface, examining rocks and beaming back data.

NASA has until the end of December to launch the \$196 million Pathfinder on its 310 million-mile journey. After that, scientists would have to wait two years until Earth and Mars are back in the necessary alignment.

"We're a museum piece if we don't launch by the 31st," said Curtis Clevin, launch operations manager.

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