

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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RESEARCHERS TO STUDY TREATMENT OF HIV PATIENTS' SKIN DISEASES

DALLAS — December 15, 1995 — UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas researchers have received the only federal grant to evaluate new or innovative treatments for skin diseases associated with human immunodeficiency virus infection and AIDS.

Over the next three years, Dr. Ponciano Cruz Jr., associate professor of dermatology and the study's primary investigator, and his colleagues want to study 300 patients, including asymptomatic HIV-infected individuals, and to compare treatments for those with seborrheic dermatitis, psoriasis, eosinophilic folliculitis, disseminated molluscum contagiosum and scabies.

"It is an axiom that people infected with HIV will develop skin diseases," Cruz said. "A key aim is to conduct studies that will compare innovative and conventional treatment for five of the most common HIV-related skin diseases with respect to efficacy, safety, impact on quality of life and cost. Concurrently, we hope to gain insight into the causation and immunologic underpinnings of these diseases."

He said that these skin diseases also occur in non-HIV infected individuals, but are more chronic and harder to treat in HIV-positive patients.

Seborrheic dermatitis flakes like dandruff on the face; molluscum causes pearly lesions; eosinophilic folliculitis causes red bumps that itch; scabies is caused by mites that burrow under the skin, also causing itching and blisters; psoriasis causes the skin to turn red and scale, and may even cause arthritis.

As the life spans of people with HIV infection increase, they are likely to develop even more skin diseases. And because their skin diseases are more resistant to conventional

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regiments, Cruz said, patients and their doctors are turning to innovative interventions.

The grant also will allow physicians to test an innovative way of attempting to delay the advancement of HIV by applying dinitrochlorobenzene (DNCB), an inexpensive compound that can cause skin allergy, on patients' skin. Preliminary studies suggest that weekly application of this allergen over several months can rev up the immune system and slow the progression of a patient's HIV infection into AIDS.

"These observations have impelled us to perform a randomized controlled study of the effects of DNCB application on the course of HIV infection, including the frequency, severity and response to treatment of skin diseases," Cruz said.

Researchers in UT Southwestern's departments of dermatology, internal medicine, microbiology, pathology and pediatrics will work together on the study, funded by an \$833,000 grant from the National Institutes of Health. Anyone seeking more information on the study should call (214) 648-2274.

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