

BREAKING NEWS —

DREXEL RESEARCHERS GET \$75K FOR COMPOUNDS THAT TARGET HIV

Paige Cooperstein May 11, 2016

Dr. Irwin Chaiken and his team at Drexel University College of Medicine this month received a \$75,000 grant from the Campbell Foundation, a Florida-based nonprofit that funds HIV/AIDS research. Chaiken's team works with specially designed molecules to target the protein on the surface of HIV that allows it to enter and infect other cells.

"Proof of principle data from basic research show that these types of compounds could stop the progression of HIV," Chaiken told PGN. "Still, a patient in remission from active treatment can harbor reservoirs of latent HIV cells that can become active again."

His team wants to explore whether the molecules, which are peptide-based compounds, may also be able to suppress these reservoirs and be useful as part of a cure approach.

Chaiken, a professor in the biochemistry and molecular biology department at Drexel, said the grant funding will go toward testing the molecules with viruses and cells taken from patients, as well as methods to encapsulate and administer the peptide compounds. The idea is to develop a long-acting release method that could be used to deliver the compounds by injection or other methods.

"Achieving full viral suppression of HIV has proven difficult, even in an age of effective drug regimens," Campbell Foundation Executive Director Ken Rapkin said in a statement. "The goal of developing a long-acting antiretroviral would be key to the overall health of those with HIV, as well as reducing the possibility of transmission."

The next phase of research for Chaiken's team will include small-animal trials to test release strategies and how well the peptide compounds survive in the circulatory system. Chaiken said his immediate team has four researchers. They also work with four other Drexel scientists in clinical research and engineering. A team in Italy is helping with small animal studies and more collaborations are possible, Chaiken said.

"This funding will allow us to collect data and then we'll be able to pursue longer-term funding from the National Institutes of Health and other agencies," he said, noting there are possible applications for the peptide-based compounds in treatment for people with HIV and prevention for people at risk of contracting it.

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