Antidepressants May Bolster Immune Function in HIV-Positive Patients

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SAN JUAN, P.R. — A selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor can enhance killer lymphocyte activity against HIV infection, according to preliminary study findings.

Depression may raise the risk of morbidity and mortality in patients with many medical conditions, including HIV infection. In addition, depression has been linked to immune function deficits, such as decreased natural killer cell activity, according to a presentation at the annual meeting of the American College of Psychiatrists.

In normal physiology, natural killer cells defend against viral infections and eliminate neoplastic cells. Natural killer cells are a focus of the ongoing HIV in Women: Depression and HIV disease and that these alterations are reversible with the resolution of a depressive episode,” the authors wrote.

HIV Neurocognitive Impairment Underrecognized, Study Shows

SAN DIEGO — Physicians at a university-based infectious disease clinic are not routinely screening for HIV-associated neurocognitive impairment in patients infected with HIV, from a small, single-center study has shown. Although the incidence of HIV neurocognitive impairment per year is decreasing, it’s still very prevalent,” Dr. Kristin M. Brousseau said in an interview during a poster session at the annual meeting of the American Neuropsychiatric Association. Cognitive impairment has significant implications for patients’ ability to adhere to their medications.

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DR. BROUSSEAU

"Physicians are ‘not doing a screening test for cognition,’ which can be performed in 5-7 minutes, she said. The researchers noted that hepatitis C coinfection and a history of interferon treatment in this population.

"Further studies are needed to determine the true prevalence of HNCI and explore the long-term impact of HCV coinfection and interferon treatment in this population,” they wrote in their poster.

—Doug Brink

Bats vs. Raccoons

DOGS are the first animal that comes to mind when most people think about rabies, but Dr. Seltz said they are not much of a threat in the United States. In 2004, only 94 rabid dogs were reported in this country, according to Dr. Seltz. Among domestic animals, there were more cases of rabid cats and rabid cattle: 281 and 115 animals, respectively.

Dog bites do account for most of the 50,000 human rabies cases worldwide each year, he said. In the United States, however, 92%-94% of animal rabies comes from wild animals.

The largest concentration of infected animals has been identified to date on the East Coast, Dr. Seltz reported. Nationwide, in 2004, there were 2,400 rabid raccoons, 1,800 skunks, and 1,100 bats. Because bats are more likely to come into contact with people, they are most often implicated in human infections. Squirrels are rarely found to be rabid, he said, as they generally do not survive the initial attack of a rabid animal.

Rabies has been found throughout the country, he continued, except for Hawaii. It is the only state with no reports.