

EM9016: Toronto Star, February 3, 1990, page J2

# **AIDS UPDATE** Drug is prolonging the lives of patients, new U.S. studies say

CHICAGO (Reuter) – The life expectancies of AIDS patients have been extended in the past few years, probably because of the increased use of the drug AZT, according to two recent U.S. studies.

A study of 4,323 AIDS patients in San Francisco also found that men survived significantly longer than women, and that patients infected through blood transfusions died much more quickly than those infected in other ways.

Although there is no cure for the acquired immune deficiency syndrome, which strips the body's immune system of its ability to fight disease, the studies found that patients who contracted the most common AIDS-related infection, a type of pneumonia known as PCP, had a slightly better chance of surviving at least one year in 1987 than they did three to five years earlier.

The two studies, one by the San Francisco public health department and the other based on nearly 37,000 AIDS cases reported to the federal Centers for Disease Control, were published in the *Journal of the American Medical*

*Association*.

"The data in these reports appear to confirm what clinicians, investigators and patients have known for several years: Life after AIDS is improving and death is no longer as swift or as certain as in the early years of the epidemic," wrote Richard Chaisson, of Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, in the accompanying editorial.

Both studies pointed to the introduction and treatment with the drug azidothymidine (AZT) as a possible reason behind the improved life expectancies for AIDS victims.

In the national survey by Jeffrey Harris, an economist at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, AIDS patients who had contracted the PCP strain of pneumonia in 1986 and 1987 had a 48.4 per cent one-year survival rate against the 39.1 per cent survival rate for patients who contracted the pneumonia in 1984.

The San Francisco study, conducted by George Lemp of the city's health department, found that 18 percent of the AIDS patients in that city who developed pneumonia survived

Number of Cases*		
(as of Jan. 29)		
LIVING	DEAD	TOTAL
Canada		
1,390	2,098	3,488
Ontario		
458	975	1,433
Toronto		
207	556	763
U.S.		
		117,781
World		
		203,354

\*Since first case in 1979

at least one year in 1987. Five years earlier, only 10 per cent survived a full year.

**REFERENCE:** J.E. Harris: Improved Short-term Survival of AIDS Patients Initially Diagnosed with *Pneumocystis carinii* Pneumonia. *JAMA* **263**(#3): 397-401 (1990). [DC Library call number: PER R15.A48]

See also the editorial *Living with AIDS* on pages 434-436 of the same issue of this journal.

The article EM9016 reprinted above is used in Figure 9.16 of the STAT 220 Course Materials.