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Scientists identify a mechanism to 'neutralise' HIV

A multinational team of experts may have accidentally identified a mechanism to neutralise the HIV virus.

The group of Russian, Swiss, British, American and Finnish scientists were developing polysulfur heterocycles, with the intention of tackling cancer. Through their extensive research, they found out the drug could be used effectively to treat HIV/AIDS by destroying the virus to ensure it does not spread to the rest of the body.

A statement from a press release at South Ural State University in Russia claims the group discovered a compound that removes zinc from the HIV virus.

Leading researcher Professor Oleg Rakitin explained: "From the very beginning, we considered the anti-cancer effect of this drug class to be our priority, but it unexpectedly turned out that such compounds can also have high and selective activity against the immunodeficiency virus of cats, which is the closest analogue of the human immunodeficiency virus."

The team discovered drugs that were potent antivirals but that did not damage the ordinary, healthy cells, therefore reducing the collateral damage experienced by so many patients on powerful antiviral medications. They aim to carry out more research in a bid to explore what other diseases the compounds could treat.

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is a virus that damages the cells in your immune system and weakens your ability to fight everyday infections and disease.

Antiretroviral medicines are used to treat HIV. They work by stopping the virus replicating in the body, allowing the immune system to repair itself and preventing further damage. Taking effective HIV treatment and being undetectable significantly reduce the risk of passing on HIV to others.

Around 90% of people living with the illness in the UK are diagnosed, according to the National AIDS Trust (NAT).

There were 37.9 million people living with AIDS/HIV worldwide in 2018, according to the latest data from UNAIDS.

New HIV infections have steadily declined by 40% since the peak in 1997.

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