MU researcher develops HIV prevention product

Compound would stop virus’ spread.

By Janene Hugwin

Monday, August 3, 2009

A University of Missouri researcher is among a team of scientists that has recently developed a compound they believe will prevent the spread of HIV.

Tests show the microbicide, known as EFdA, stops HIV from replicating or spreading when applied to human cells. Stefan Sarafianos, assistant professor of microbiology and immunology in MU’s School of Medicine, is working on that product with collaborators from the University of Pittsburgh and Japan.

Ultimately, Sarafianos envisions the compound being used in a topical product similar to spermicides.

“Women would be able to apply it to themselves and have control over the situation, unlike other forms of protection,” he said.

Although it’s still in the research stage, “hopefully companies will eventually license and develop it as a product,” Sarafianos said.

That should be good news for Mid-Missouri, which saw an 18 percent spike in people needing treatment for AIDS and HIV this year, according to RAIN, which manages casework for patients. In July, RAIN Executive Director Cale Mitchell said his group added 58 clients over a 12-month period ending in May. He blamed some of that increase on a lax attitude among young people.

But it’s tough to say whether that group would take advantage of HIV preventative medications, even if they were available, said Gregory Zimet, a professor at the Indiana University School of Medicine who has studied vaccines and related behaviors.
Zimet recently teamed up with MU's Russell Ravert, an assistant professor of human development and family studies, to examine whether young adults would get HIV vaccinations if such shots were available.

The researchers found that students who know their lifestyle puts them at risk for sexually transmitted diseases would be more likely to receive an HIV vaccination. However, controlling for behavior, the study showed that students would be less likely to get the vaccine if they're worried about what others think of them, Ravert said.

That psychological barrier might be easier to overcome if an HIV preventative medication were available on the shelf instead of having to get it through a more elaborate three-shot vaccination, Zimet said.

"Someone might be potentially embarrassed by being in the checkout line with condoms or a tube of microbicide, so that could pose an obstacle," Zimet said. "On the other hand, the kinds of perceptions of others are important. Perceived norms are important, so if other students in a peer group value using condoms or microbicides and would want them to use them, they'd be more likely to buy them."

Of course, as the study confirmed, there are always going to be the young people who would not get an HIV vaccination because they feel invincible. Those students also would likely forgo a topical preventative product and are probably the same people who opt not to use condoms, floss their teeth or wear seat belts, Zimet said.

At the same time, Ravert said, his research proved that not all college kids fit into that stereotype.

"Findings did not support a simple stereotype of college students as risk-takers who ignore the consequences of their actions," he said. "Overall, students who engaged in risky behavior felt more susceptible to HIV and were more likely to say they would accept a vaccine. ... So, although there isn't a simple answer as to who will get a vaccine or not, the study helped us better understand different variables that weigh in on those decisions."
College grads have diplomas, but no paychecks

By EMILY VAN ZANDT and CHAD DAY

Amanda Palacios sat near the window of an Overland Park coffee shop this summer. She was just back from her honeymoon in Las Vegas and had a lot on her mind.

The tire on her husband's truck was flat, her health insurance had run out and, like many 2009 college graduates, she couldn't find a real job.

"I'm terrified of the next six months," she said.

So are a lot of '09 grads.

For the first time in more than 25 years, the unemployment rate for 20- to 24-year-olds is above 14 percent. Only 20 percent of 2009 college grads who applied for a job graduated with one in hand, according to a May report by the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

Solid statistics on how many in the class of 2009 have been hired since graduation aren't available yet.

But recent grads don't need numbers to know how bad it is.

Palacios graduated from the University of Missouri-Kansas City with a degree in music education. Of the 15 people graduating in her major, she knows of only two who have teaching jobs.

Despite job searches that started long before they left college, many grads have spent the summer trolling job listings. But fewer jobs are being posted.

Amanda Nell, director of student employment at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, noted a 36 percent drop over the past year in postings on MU's job Web site, HireMizzouTigers.com.

Career fairs on college campuses also took a hit this year.

"We discovered we had about a 7.4 percent decrease in employers participating in career fairs this year," Nell said. "And even if the companies do show up and collect the resumes, there is no guarantee that they're actually hiring."

When jobs open, there's increased competition as new grads go up against unemployed workers with years more experience.

"People with experience are trying to get entry-level jobs that have typically gone to new college graduates," said David Gaston, director of the University Career Center at the University of Kansas.

For Palacios and her husband, the latest struggle seems to be finding health care coverage. Many twentysomethings are dropped from their parents' insurance coverage when they graduate or turn 23, and the reality can be quite a shock.

"I can't go to the dentist just to get my teeth cleaned," Palacios said.

But despite a depressing summer, the class of 2009 isn't entirely discouraged.

Although nearly two-thirds of them were worried about finding a job, 52 percent said they were confident they'd be employed within three months of graduation, according to the association of colleges and employers.

**Andrew Carleton: A missing piece**

The sequence added up on paper just like the equations Andrew Carleton pored over for the last four years.
Get an engineering degree from Kansas State University. Live at home in Leawood for less than a month. Find a job. Then live on his own, in his own place.

But one piece — finding a job — threw the whole thing off.

"I was told initially that engineering, particularly civil engineering, was a good market. I mean, there were buildings going up all the time then," said Carleton, 21.

That was back in the summer of 2005 when he decided to be a structural engineer and planned to attend K-State after graduating from Blue Valley West High School.

But, like most careers, the job outlook for engineering worsened at the beginning of Carleton's senior year in college.

Then the bottom fell out. He's kept up with the 20 members of his civil engineering May 2009 graduating class, and only a quarter had jobs lined up after graduation. Half chose to wait out the recession in graduate school.

Carleton was in the other quarter: the unemployed.

More than two months after graduation, he's back at his parents' house.

"I know that he wants to get a job and get out on his own," said Carleton's father, Ted Carleton. "The wheels are just turning slow right now."

Carleton has gotten some interviews and even been told he's the ideal candidate, only to get an e-mail a week later informing him that someone with more experience took the entry-level job.

He said his parents have been supportive.

"They keep pushing for me to get a job, but I don't think they are trying to get me out the door. ... They think it makes sense that I'm not spending money on a place when I could just stay there," he said.

**Amanda Palacios: A tough decision**

It was a tough decision: Take a part-time job in the field she loved, or take a promotion at another job that would get her benefits.

Amanda Palacios, who graduated in May from the University of Missouri-Kansas City, had been working part time at a salon on the Country Club Plaza when the call she had been waiting for all summer finally came:

A small private school in Kansas City offering a part-time job teaching music to kindergartners through eighth-graders wanted her for the position.

But the job didn't offer the benefits she and her husband, who live in Overland Park, need. An opportunity for promotion at the salon meant she could get health care coverage. But could she give up on her dream of being a music teacher?

"It's the only thing I really know how to do well," Palacios said.

She graduated from the UMKC Conservatory of Music's five-year music education program: Three years of music training, two years of teacher education, 18 weeks of student teaching.

"It was a lot harder than I thought," said Palacios of her time student teaching at Olathe East High School. "The kids are so smart. I had to know exactly what to say."

Palacios went on to become a May graduate, June bride and July unemployment statistic.

Her husband, Edgar Palacios, is working as an Allstate agent, and while they make enough to get by, they are struggling to get health insurance and gain financial independence from their parents.
Despite starting her job search well before graduation, Palacios had only a few promising job interviews. Many schools are cutting music programs, moving arts teachers from full to part time or moving one teacher among several schools.

So she was shocked when Christ the King Parish School contacted her in July to offer her the job. It may be only two days a week, but it’s something.

And she’s taking it.

“I can’t sleep at night because I’m so terrified for my first day,” Palacios said. “I want to follow my dream.”

Delilah Whitley: Needing help herself

Delilah Whitley wants a career helping college students find the right degree and then the right job.

But for the last few months, she’s been the one looking for the right job and coming up empty.

After graduating from the University of Missouri in May with a bachelor’s degree in communications, she’s been applying without success for positions in admissions offices at colleges in Kansas City.

Now she’s considering changing her course and maybe going back to school to become certified to teach.

“It’s not too late in my book to change what I want to do,” she said.

For the last seven years, the 22-year-old from Kansas City, Kan., has been a fervent volunteer at organizations such as the Boys & Girls Club and Big Brothers Big Sisters.

“It’s where my heart is: helping people, especially young people,” she said.

For now, she’s back home applying for jobs and teaching swimming lessons.

As the days without a job pile up, Whitley’s mother, Gail Whitley, said she’s noticed her daughter becoming more and more frustrated.

“It makes you wonder, with college and all the time and energy you put in, was it worth it?” she said.

Delilah Whitley knows she’s not the only one poring over the job boards and coming up empty.

So she’s waiting it out with the help of her parents and staying optimistic.

“I’m not struggling too much. That’s why I’m being very patient,” she said. “I’ll still have the same plans and goals in mind. It’s going to just get pushed back a bit.”

Andrew Stanley: Leaving the country

When a college grad who built latrines in Bolivia for free can’t get a job in nonprofit work, you know it’s bad.

Andrew Stanley headed off to the South American country to do volunteer work after graduating from the University of Kansas in May.

He came back to Overland Park for a few weeks, and last week he flew off again — this time to Guatemala, where he will spend the next six months.

He didn’t plan it that way. Despite months of searching, Stanley just couldn’t get hired stateside.

“But I never thought I’d be here, where I couldn’t find a job at all,” he said.

Stanley wasn’t looking for much — pay wasn’t a concern. He was determined to find nonprofit work for educational exchange programs or with sustainable development projects.

At KU, he majored in Latin American studies and worked in the international programs office.

He’s fluent in Spanish and spent time in Guatemala, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Mexico on mission trips and while studying abroad.
In June, he went to Bolivia for Engineers Without Borders. Building the toilets required two weeks of hauling wheelbarrows of sand up a path crowded with donkeys, roosters and sheep at 15,000 feet above sea level.

That's the type of work Stanley has been looking for.

Stanley's parents support his desire to be different. "He has always followed his heart," said his father, John Stanley.

This time, his church needed someone to go to the San Lucas Mission in Guatemala to assess the community's needs.

"It's a way to get by for six months," Stanley said. Until February, Stanley will live at the mission, earning a $100 monthly stipend. The church pays for his room and board.

"It's not something I imagined doing," he said. "It might be a little lonely."

---

Emily Van Zandt and Chad Day have some experience with this summer's job search. Both graduated in May from the University of Missouri with journalism degrees, and they're working as summer reporting interns for The Kansas City Star.

To reach Emily Van Zandt, call 816-234-4412 or send e-mail to evanzandt@kcstar.com. To read Chad Day, call 816-234-4188 or send e-mail to cday@kcstar.com.
MUPD receives internal praise

By Janese Heavin

Posted August 3, 2009 at 1:35 p.m.

A handful of University of Missouri employees took a few moments today to compliment the campus police force during a public hearing.

The lunch-hour hearing was part of the process to re-accredit University of Missouri police through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies. Three assessors are in town looking at department policies, procedures, operations and support services.

During the hearing, UM System Chief of Staff David Russell touted MU Chief Jack Watring's service not only to the Columbia campus but the system as a whole. "I'm proud of this police department," Russell said. MUPD "sets the standard for other police departments" on the four-campus system.

Jordan Paul, MU student body president, said the department is always willing to help students, including assisting student leaders when they do periodic safety checks. Watring is accommodating, Paul said, and the chief and his staff "go out of their way to help MU students."

Frankie Minor, director of residential life, praised the department's professionalism, as well as its compassion for victims and their families.

An official from the Missouri Highway Patrol was on the only person to call in Sunday, when assessors opened phone lines for public input. The accrediting agency has received two letters to date about MUPD, both in support, said Greg King, chief of university police at California State University.

It's not unusual to hear glowing reviews of a department during the reaccreditation process, said King, who is leading the assessment team here. Only about 5 to 10 percent of input received through the accreditation process is not complimentary, he said.

One thing King said he's specifically looking at is MUPD's efforts to recruit minority candidates. It's not always easy to get women and minorities on staff, King acknowledged, but he said MU does a good job trying to reach out to those populations. Of the 32 sworn officers at MU, two are female, one is a Hispanic male and one is American Indian, said Capt. Brian Weimer. The campus safety officers, which include part-time students, is a more diverse group, he said.
It's not too late to provide input about MUPD. Written comments can be sent to: Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, 10302 Eaton Place, Suite 100, Fairfax, Va., 22030-2215.
Public shares views of campus police department

Tuesday, August 4, 2009 | 12:01 a.m. CDT
BY Matthew Schatt

Members of the public shared their experiences and praise for the MU Police Department during a Monday meeting with assessors for the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies.

About a dozen people participated in a 30-minute meeting in Memorial Union, where six Columbia supporters testified in favor of the department receiving re-accreditation.

Jordan Paul, president of the Missouri Students Association, described his experience working with MU police. One cooperative event is the student safety walk. Student leaders and administrators tour the campus along with MU police and look for safety hazards, such as poor lighting and broken blue-light phones used to contact police in an emergency.

“I’ve never had problems with campus police in any context,” Paul said. He later said MU police are often criticized by students for crackdowns on minor crimes like drinking and speeding, but he thinks officers are more interested in overall campus safety.

To gain re-accreditation, the MU Police Department must meet 357 of the accreditation commission’s 463 standards. Capt. Brian Weimer of MU police said the department sent copies of its files for review more than a month ago to prove the Police Department has followed its own policies and to check its compliance with the agency’s standards.

Since arriving in Columbia on Saturday for the on-site assessment, the assessors have conducted MU police employee interviews, participated in ride-alongs and gathered public comments by phone, Weimer said. The on-site assessment will finish Tuesday with exit interviews of Weimer, Chief Jack Watring and other personnel.

Weimer estimated the assessors will have a completed draft of their report for the commission a month from now. Watring is scheduled to appear before the commission for its decision in November.

The MU Police Department was last re-accredited in 2006. “It helps ensure that you’re on the cutting edge of professionalism,” Weimer said.

Weimer said the Missouri State Highway Patrol is also accredited by the commission, but the Columbia Police Department and Boone County Sheriff’s Department are not.