

Patients find AIDS drugs ineffective

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About 40,000 people with AIDS in the United States are finding that anti-retroviral drugs no longer work.

The drugs turned the disease from a death sentence to a chronic condition and cut the mortality rate sharply. In 2004, 15,798 deaths from AIDS were reported, less than one-third of the 51,000 reported in 1995, The Wall Street Journal reported.

But the drugs are not a cure.

"We've only changed the slope of the disease progression, not halted it altogether, and eventually they do run out of options," Daniel Kuritzkes, associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School, told the newspaper.

The next step, for many patients, is salvage therapy. That can include going back to older drugs or searching out experimental treatments.

AIDS is a difficult disease to treat because HIV is a retrovirus that mutates frequently. Some doctors say aggressive treatment in the early days of drug therapy, with patients switching to new ones as soon as they became available, encouraged drug resistance.

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