

Media Coverage

Company: AusBiotech
Date: 17 October 2010
Publication: Stonnington Leader
Page: Online

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Search for longer life in Prahran

by Sally Spalding

DESPITE successful therapy through early intervention, HIV patients continue to have only a 50 per cent chance of reaching age 70.

But research at Prahran's Burnett Institute might be able to extend patients' life span in the future.

PhD student Gregor Lichtfuss is researching how components of blood cells in patients with HIV affect the gut's lining.

Working with two patient groups - those under treatment displaying symptoms and those who are "healthy" - Mr Lichtfuss has been analysing their blood cells to find how the immune system might be made stronger.

Previously employed in the German public health system, Mr Lichtfuss, from Munich, has always worked in immunology.

"This AIDS virus is an intriguing disease," he said. "I have been working on it for 2 1/2 years and I feel I am no closer to knowing anything about it.

"But what I have learned is we are one step closer to a cure through this research."

Mr Lichtfuss's research is on blood cells that have the power to kill HIV-infected cells. But for most HIV patients, they are too low in number and do not kill the cells.

"If we can discover how to make these cells stronger to restore the immune system to its full strength, then we are one step closer to finding a cure," he said.

Lichtfuss is the Victorian winner of the AusBiotech GSK Student Excellence Awards.

He will compete for the national title with his AIDS research later this month.