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## HIV-Infected Patients' Life Expectancy Increased by 13 Years

By Chantal Britt

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July 25 (Bloomberg) -- HIV-infected patients in North America and Europe are living at least 13 years longer on average as a result of combination drug therapies introduced in the mid-1990s, according to a study in the journal [Lancet](#).

A 20-year-old patient taking the drugs in 2005 could expect to live to 69.4 years of age, said researchers led by [Robert Hogg](#) of the British Columbia Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS in Vancouver. When this type of therapy began in 1996, a 20-year-old could only expect to live to 56.1 years, the research concluded.

The data, gleaned from 14 studies, was released in advance of the world's largest biennial meeting on AIDS research, scheduled to begin Aug. 3 in Mexico City. The sooner patients received combination treatments after diagnosis, the longer they lived, The Lancet report said.

"These figures are startling and will surely help clinicians raise the hopes and expectations of patients," said [David Cooper](#) from the University of New South Wales in Sydney, in a commentary accompanying the study.

In 1996, researchers began combining use of three existing families of drugs that fought the disease in different ways in order to reduce the virus's ability to mutate and survive in the body. Before the new therapies were introduced, patients often developed lasting resistance to individual drugs.

About 33 million people were living with HIV last year and 2.1 million people died from the illness. The goal of HIV therapy is to reduce blood levels of the virus as low as possible for as long as possible to slow the disease's progress.

## Later Treatment

The Lancet report also said that patients treated later in their infection throughout the study had an average total life expectancy of 52.4 years, compared with 70.4 years among patients treated earlier in their disease. Women with HIV had longer life expectancies than men, which may be because they generally start treatment earlier, the researchers said.

Hogg's work looked at 43,355 HIV-infected patients, of whom 2,056 had died. Hogg worked as part of the Antiretroviral Therapy Cohort Collaboration, which included researchers in Canada, the U.K., France, Switzerland, the U.S., Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and Spain. London-based GlaxoSmithKline Plc, Europe's largest drugmaker, and the U.K. Medical Research Council sponsored Hogg's paper.

"These advances in treatment have transformed HIV from being a fatal disease, which was the reality for patients before the advent of combination treatment, into a long-term chronic condition," [Hogg](#) said in the study.

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