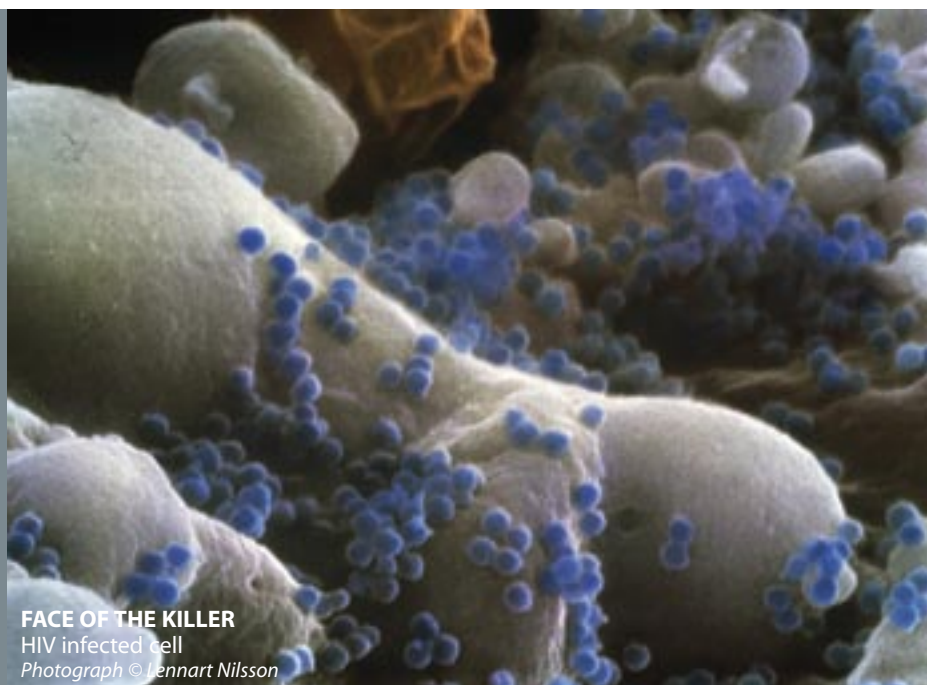


European 'super-network' of scientists leads fight against HIV/AIDS infection



FACE OF THE KILLER
HIV infected cell
Photograph © Lennart Nilsson

A new network of AIDS researchers from 10 countries are pooling their knowledge in a bid to develop vaccines and microbicides which could work together to stop the virus being transmitted.

The Europrise group comprises leading scientists from 32 institutions – from universities to pharmaceutical companies such as GlaxoSmithKline and Novartis – in an ambitious European project on HIV prevention.

Backed by a €15.5 million grant from the European Commission, EUROPRISE will spend the next five years carrying out coordinated research into the whole pipeline of vaccine and microbicide development, from discovery through to early clinical trials.

It hopes to produce a vaccine and a vaginal microbicide (topically applied drugs to prevent infection), which women can use alone or in combination to stop transmission of the virus during sex.

Globally, there are 14,000 new HIV infections per day, with 40 million people living with

HIV at the end of 2006, according to the World Health Organisation.

While public health programmes encouraging the use of condoms have achieved reduced HIV infection rates, and therapeutics for HIV/AIDS continue to improve, EUROPRISE scientists believe that the development of safe and effective strategies of blocking and preventing HIV transmission will be key to combating this pandemic.

Women are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection and are often at risk despite being in a stable relationship in which they are monogamous. An effective vaccine or microbicide would give women means of protection that they can choose and control themselves, so that where there is inconsistent or no condom use they still have other options.

EUROPRISE is focused on the premise that microbicides and vaccines that target multiple stages of HIV transmission will have the best chance of success. It is hoped that combining these two fields will drive the development of products that provide multiple levels of protection against HIV infection.

Notes

EUROPRISE stands for European Vaccines and Microbicides Enterprise. The group has been formed to carry out this project for five years, ending in 2012. The countries taking part are the UK, Italy, Sweden, Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands, Russia and Spain. The Project Reference is 037611.

The co-ordinators are as follows:

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