

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CXVII, Number 80, 9 September 1993 — Profs receive NIH grant for AIDS research [ARTICLE]

## Profs receive NIH grant for AIDS research

**By Mike Stanton**

*Spectator Staff Writer*

Researchers at the Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center recently received a \$1.8 million grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to establish an AIDS Clinical Trial Center to study the virus in the center's Washington Heights neighborhood.

Professor of Clinical Medicine Jay Dobkin, a principal investigator on the study, said the program will allow Columbia to establish a Clinical Trial Center, one of 35 in the country.

“Individual sites do not carry out

their own research, but work together with the other sites in the program," Dobkin said. "This group of clinics is the main NIH program to do drug trials with AIDS patients in the United States."

Professor of Medicine Harold Neu, another principal investigator, said the study will be one of the first to concentrate on the effects of different therapies and treatments on a non-white, non-gay population.

"The best studies to date have all been done with the gay whites, and they are a different population from the patients we serve at Presbyterian," Neu said. "We have a very large black and Hispanic population, and a large number of our patients are women."

Although much of the work the Columbia researchers do will be dictated by the NIH, Dobkin said the researchers' own interests would also be taken into consideration.

"Our work will especially study the neurologic effects of certain treatment protocols, and see if certain drugs can help patients think better, as well as determining the neuro-

logical effects of some of the antiviral drugs currently in use," he said.

In addition to the work at Columbia Presbyterian, a subgroup, led by principal investigator Professor of Clinical Medicine Wasaa El-Sadr, will establish a clinic at the Harlem Hospital Center, which is affiliated with the University.

Dobkin said the award comes at a time when questions are being raised about the basis of much of the AIDS research that has been conducted in the last decade.

"There's a lot of reexamination of the AIDS study process going on, and that may lead to changes in the way research is undertaken," Dobkin said. "But one of the most difficult things to deal with is that stampede mentality that comes into play whenever something promising comes along."

Neu said the surrounding population would, in some part, define the areas on which the researchers would concentrate.

"About 50 percent of the tuberculosis patients in New York City today are also HIV positive," Neu said. "In addition, many of our pa-

tients contracted the virus in connection with drug use, rather than through intercourse, and this is another variable that has not been studied at length.”

According to Neu, the researchers are currently working on attracting patients to the new program, and determining exactly which treatments will be used.

“All of these treatment protocols have to be approved by the Columbia Presbyterian’s Investigative Review Board,” Neu said. “Even though they have been used before in other programs, they have to be reapproved at each individual site before they can be used there.”

Dobkin and Neu said the researchers prepared their application to the program for almost two years before it was approved. The grant will last for three years, at which time it must be renewed by the NIH.

“Columbia Presbyterian is a major institution, with a great number of resources,” Dobkin said. “But I think that the population we serve is a high priority for today’s NIH AIDS studies, and that helped our application.”