Aggressive form of leukemia ‘wiped out’ by genetically modified immune cell therapy

Two kinds of incurable blood cancer have been eradicated in more than two out of three patients by a therapy that turns the body’s defenses against tumors.

Over the past five years, scientists have become good at taking out patients’ immune cells and tweaking them into a genetically modified drug that can hunt down cancer.

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Researchers at Pennsylvania University hospital in the US have wiped out [an aggressive] kind of leukemia in eight out of nine high-risk patients with a new version of the treatment.

Chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL) is the most common kind of the blood cancer in adults, killing 1,000 people a year in Britain. Most patients are given the drug ibrutinib, but in 60 per cent of cases it works only partially…Saar Gill found that by combining ibrutinib with the GM immune cell therapy they could destroy all traces of the tumor.

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“Cure is a difficult word,” Dr. Gill said. “They’re not cured — we will know they are cured if they remain cancer-free for a long time. But the majority of patients have no detectable CLL left.”

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