Fighting infectious diseases with immunotherapy on 'cusp of commercialization'

Immunotherapy, which involves adapting immune cells to destroy specific cellular targets, has made a name for itself treating cancer. But over the last few years, a handful of research groups have advanced T-cell therapies for viral infections, and are now on the cusp of commercialization. "Using T cells to target infectious diseases is not a new field," says immunologist <u>Michael Keller</u> of Children's National Hospital in Washington, D.C., "but it's something that's expanding a great deal."

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So researchers are pursuing a combination of strategies aimed at either banking T cells from donors who have already experienced viral infections or training virus-naive T cells taken from unexposed tissues such as umbilical cord blood to help make antiviral immunotherapies more robust and more widely available.

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Over the past several decades, most research on antiviral T cells has focused on people undergoing bone marrow transplants for blood cancers such as leukemia.

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Pharmaceutical firms have invested billions of dollars in cancer immunotherapies over the last few years, and the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) began approving such therapies in recent months. But the investment bonanza has yet to hit antiviral T-cell therapy. While a handful of companies, including <u>Atara</u>, Viracyte, <u>Tessa</u>, and <u>Cell Medica</u>, have partnered with university researchers and conducted Phase 2 trials, most of the work on antiviral T-cell therapy is still funded by governments and private philanthropy, Keller says.

Read full, original post: Antiviral Immunotherapy Comes of Age