

## In the news

### ANTIBODIES DRIVE AN AIDS-LIKE SYNDROME

A new disease characterized by AIDS-like symptoms has been identified by researchers at the US National Institutes of Health (NIH). The good news is the disease is not contagious — it is caused by autoantibodies specific for interferon- $\gamma$  (IFN $\gamma$ ). The bad news is researchers do not understand what triggers the production of these autoantibodies.

The disease is being referred to as adult-onset immunodeficiency syndrome and has been identified primarily in middle-aged people from Asia or of Asian descent. According to Dr Anthony Fauci, Director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) at the NIH, the disease was first discovered in Asia around 2004 when doctors found that some patients with AIDS-related opportunistic infections were not actually infected with HIV (*CNN*, 23 Aug 2012).

A study of 203 HIV-negative volunteers from Thailand and Taiwan found that 88% of individuals with symptoms of immunodeficiency had normal CD4<sup>+</sup> T cell counts but high levels of IFN $\gamma$ -specific antibodies in their blood (*N. Engl. J. Med.*, 23 Aug 2012). Says Fauci: “The reason the body is making that antibody is unclear, but it isn’t a virus like HIV that is causing it ... it’s an autoimmune disease”.

Dr Sarah Browne from the NIAID helped conduct the clinical study and emphasizes the need to work out “what triggers people to make these antibodies in the first place” and to “use that information to guide treatment”. Current treatment approaches include antibiotics and a cancer drug that suppresses antibody production. However, Dr Browne cautions that these therapies are “not treating the underlying cause”. She also warns that there are likely to be other undiagnosed patients with the syndrome and “many cases mistaken as tuberculosis” (*Associated Press*, 24 Aug 2012).

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