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## LONG-TERM NON-PROGRESSION WITH HIV INFECTION: LESSONS FROM HIV-2

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**BACKGROUND:** HIV-2 infection is found predominantly in West Africa and countries with former socioeconomic ties to Portugal. It presents the unusual clinical picture in which the majority of infected people behave as long-term non-progressors (LTNP) and die of unrelated causes, while a smaller number of infected subjects develop a syndrome indistinguishable from AIDS caused by HIV-1. Although the pro-viral HIV load is similar between HIV-1- and HIV-2-infected people at the same stage of disease, the LTNP can be distinguished on the basis of low plasma viral load. This observation suggests that either the virus cannot continue to replicate efficiently in human cells or replication is controlled by an effective immune response.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Data will be presented from recent immunological and virological studies in cohorts of HIV-2-infected donors in the Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, West Africa. The HIV-2-infected LTNP have preserved HIV-specific T-helper responses, characterized by interleukin-2 (IL-2) production and proliferation, and are distinguished by strong responses toward a highly conserved region of the HIV-2 gag protein. Understanding the basis of delayed disease progression in the majority of HIV-2-infected people should provide insights into the key requirements for protective immunity against HIV infection.

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7

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