

# Frontiers in Clinical Drug Research (HIV)



**Editor:**  
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# Frontiers in Clinical Drug Research-HIV

*(Volume 5)*

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## PREFACE

The book series *Frontiers in Clinical Drug Research-HIV* presents important recent developments in the form of cutting-edge reviews written by eminent authorities in the field. The chapters in this 5<sup>th</sup> volume are mainly focused on different therapies, cell reservoirs of HIV-1, the combination of drugs and nanotechnology in the diagnosis and prognosis of HIV infection.

Wong and Jiang in *Chapter 1* review therapeutic interventions for HIV that have entered preclinical and clinical trials. They also highlight their cure potentials and associated limitations. Liang *et al.*, in *Chapter 2* review the HIV-1 genotypic DR testing methods and focus on the main NGS platforms which are available for HIV-1 DR diagnosis. *Chapter 3* by Vanangamudi *et al.*, presents the currently available information on multiple drug combinations against HIV and the development of long-acting antiretroviral drugs. *Chapter 4* by Wadhvani focuses on HIV pathogenesis and the role of nanotechnology in HIV diagnostics, drug delivery, and therapy. In the final chapter, Zaib *et al.* give an overview of the therapeutic drugs against HIV, their mechanism of action, their side effects as well as their recommended dosage.

I am grateful to all the eminent scientists for their excellent contributions. I also express my gratitude to the editorial staff, particularly Mr. Mahmood Alam (Editorial Director) and Ms. Fariya Zulfiqar (Manager Publications) for their hard work and persistent efforts.

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**CHAPTER 1**

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**Clinical Eradication of Latent HIV Reservoirs:  
Where are we Now?****Lilly M. Wong<sup>1</sup> and Guochun Jiang<sup>1,2,\*</sup>**<sup>1</sup> *UNC HIV Cure Center, Institute of Global Health and Infectious Diseases, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, USA*<sup>2</sup> *Department of Biochemistry and Biophysics, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, USA*

**Abstract:** Antiretroviral therapy (ART) is the leading therapeutic strategy for the suppression of HIV-1 (HIV) replication. However, ART is a life-long treatment with no effective sterilizing or functional cure of HIV. The main challenge with ART is its inability to eradicate HIV residing in the long-lived resting CD4<sup>+</sup> T cells, otherwise known as the main latent HIV cellular reservoirs. HIV reservoirs are commonly found in various areas of the body: brain, liver, placenta, skin, GALT, and lymphoid tissues. Withdrawal of ART leads to the rapid rebound of viremia or progress into AIDS without re-treatment. Current clinical approaches such as “shock and kill,” “block and lock,” and gene editing exploit the molecular pathways of HIV latency for eradication or permanent suppression of the latent reservoirs. Novel pre-clinical or clinical approaches must take several limitations into consideration: dose-limiting toxicity, potency, and specificity. These limitations are the barriers to reservoir clearance. The “shock and kill” method employs latency reversal agents (LRAs), including histone deacetylase inhibitors (vorinostat, romidepsin, and panobinostat), PKC agonists (bryostatins, prostratin, ingenol, or Kansui), SMAC mimetics, STImulator of INterferon Gene (STING) agonists, and TLR agonists, for the disruption of HIV latency and subsequent eradication of latently infected cells. This is followed by immune clearance, including broadly neutralizing antibodies (bnAbs), therapeutic vaccines, or the use of immune checkpoint inhibitors (ICPi). LRAs have exhibited the ability to increase transcription. However, of the recognized LRAs, none have single-handedly reduced the reservoir, which underscores a potential need for combinational strategies. While some of these interventions have entered trials, repurposing our efforts towards a functional cure of HIV may also be productive. The “block and lock” method seeks permanent silencing of HIV transcriptional machinery through targets such as HIV protein Tat to possibly achieve remodeling of the epigenetic landscape at HIV LTR. Here, we review therapeutic interventions that have entered preclinical and pilot clinical trials and highlight their cure potentials and associated limitations. Prospective directions will be discussed for the development of these new therapeutics into drugs for the cure of HIV.

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**Keywords:** Deep latency, Epigenetics, HIV latency, HIV reservoir, Shock and kill.

## HIV PANDEMIC IN THE CURRENT SETTING

Human immunodeficiency virus type 1 (HIV-1), a retrovirus discovered in 1983, is the causative agent of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). HIV transmission occurs through three routes: sexual intercourse, vertical (mother-to-child) transmission, and intravenous injection. Since the discovery of HIV, there have been 32.7 million deaths worldwide, and it affects more than 38 million individuals [1]. In the past few decades, the course of treatment for HIV infection has greatly improved through the establishment of antiretroviral therapy (ART). In 1985, the development of Retrovir® (zidovudine) by a collaboration between GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) and Samuel Broder demonstrated that HIV infection is manageable and survivable [2]. With the discovery of Retrovir®, seven distinct drug classes emerged with FDA approval: (1) nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs), (2) nonnucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NNRTIs), (3) protease inhibitors, (4) entry inhibitors, (5) integrase inhibitors, (6) coreceptor antagonists and (7) post-attachment inhibitors [3]. Of the seven drug classes, some HIV regimens exploit several drugs as a combinational strategy with the intention of targeting several mechanisms for HIV [4].

In 2019, only 66% (25.4 million out of 38 million individuals) of HIV-positive individuals had access to ART [1]. Individuals often deal with social stigma from the diagnosis of HIV/AIDS along with socioeconomic stress. These factors impact adherence, where pill fatigue and drug resistance can lead individuals to further complications or AIDS. Comorbidities can also introduce pharmacokinetic drug-drug interactions, a consequence often observed in aging populations [5]. ART has the ability to manage HIV infection effectively by suppressing HIV replication to minimal proviral loads (*i.e.*, <50 copies/ml is the standard for the limit of detection) and latent HIV or possibly residual viral replication is responsible for the rebound of HIV when treatment is interrupted. Infected CD4<sup>+</sup> T while cells turn to quiescence in the form of memory T cells, which harbor integrated HIV DNA, also called HIV provirus. These quiescent memory T cells have an estimated half-life of 44 months by quantitative viral outgrowth assay (QVOA) [6] or 48 months by intact proviral DNA assay (IPDA) [7]. Even with ART, it would require more than 73 years of treatment to eliminate the latent infection as the provirus remains undetectable by the immune system and continues to evade viral cytopathic effects (CPE); therefore, individuals must remain on treatment indefinitely in order to purge the reservoirs. In addition to the lifelong requirement of ART, treatment interruption poses another problem. Upon interruption of ART, the memory T cells harboring the stable proviral DNA can

generate new replication and infections, which may be therapy-resistant [8]. Most HIV-positive individuals have a viral rebound, typically observed two weeks post-interruption due to the induction of productive HIV replication *via* cytokine induction encounters with latent proviruses [9]. These limitations reveal the need to develop therapeutic strategies that can effectively target the latent reservoirs.

Elite controllers, individuals who maintain silent viral reservoirs without intervention, make up less than 0.5% of HIV-infected individuals [10, 11]. For these HIV controllers, it indicates the potential for an HIV cure. Notably, only two individuals have been cured of HIV: the “Berlin Patient” and the “London Patient.” In 2009, the “Berlin Patient” (Timothy Ray Brown) was cured of HIV after receiving a hematopoietic stem cell (HSC) transplant from a donor containing an entry chemokine receptor (CCR5) mutation to prevent HIV infection of healthy cells (CCR5D32) [12]. The “Essen Patient” underwent an allogeneic HSCT, but upon ART interruption, rapid viral rebound occurred through the alternative entry coreceptor, CXCR4, *via* receptor switch [13]. After several unsuccessful attempts over the years with various candidates, the “London Patient” (Adam Castillejo) was announced free of HIV in 2019 after complications with grade 1 graft-*versus*-host disease (GVHD), cytomegalovirus (CMV), and Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) [14]. Unfortunately, HSCTs are limited in their benefits to provide a cure for HIV as HSCTs are hard to scale for populations due to difficulty in finding donor matches. In addition, the procedure has risks such as opportunistic infections and immunosuppression [15]. While the two individuals who are cured of HIV are a cause for celebration, the recurring success of an HIV cure through HSCTs indicates that we should move forward towards a sterilizing or functional cure through other methods for purposes of scalability and efficiency.

## MOLECULAR MECHANISMS OF HIV LATENCY

Acute onset of HIV replication in susceptible target cells is followed by the rapid depletion of CD4<sup>+</sup> T cells, which indicates the existence of HIV infection [16]. As a result of the rapid replication, high viral plasma loads are apparent [16]. There are three hallmarks for an HIV-infected individual: acute infection, clinical latency (also known as chronic HIV infection), and AIDS diagnosis [17]. Several genes are required for HIV replication and transcription in host immune cells to necessitate its survival; these genes include structural (*gag*, *pol*, and *env*), regulatory (*tat* and *rev*), and accessory (*vif*, *vpr*, and *nef*), which are flanked by two long terminal repeats (LTRs) at the 5' and 3' end. HIV transcription is further promoted through strict control of several mechanisms that target the Tat-TAR complex *via* viral host factors such as P-TEFb or cyclin T1 (CycT1)/cyclin-dependent kinase 9 (CDK9). During infection, clinical latency can be established

## CHAPTER 2

## HIV-1 Genotypic Drug Resistance Testing and Next-Generation Sequencing

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**Abstract:** The emergence and spread of HIV drug resistance (DR) is threatening the global advances gained from antiretroviral therapy (ART) in suppressing HIV-1 infection and reducing AIDS-related morbidity and mortality over the last decade. Next-generation sequencing (NGS) has fundamentally altered the landscape of HIV-1 DR testing through widely and deep sequencing in a much more cost effective and rapid manner. NGS is improving our ability to understand, diagnose, and prevent HIV DR by accurately identifying low abundant (< 20%) HIV DR variants (LADRVs) relevant to ART outcomes. NGS has been increasingly adopted by research and clinical laboratories for research, surveillance, and clinical monitoring of HIV DR in the last decade. However, NGS faces a number of limitations in its application of HIV DR testing, including sequencing error management, standardization of NGS procedures and instruments, external quality assurance of laboratories, computational and bioinformatics challenges. In this chapter, we will review the HIV-1 genotypic DR testing methods with the focus on the main NGS platforms available for HIV-1 DR diagnosis, their characteristics, applications, and limitations. In addition, we will systematically review LADRV in its distribution, prevalence, mechanism, and impact on ART outcomes. In the end, we will review the host factors, including the human leukocyte antigen (HLA), which effects the efficacy of ART.

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**Keywords:** Allele-specific assays, Antiretroviral therapy, Drug resistance, HIV-1, Low abundant HIV-1 drug-resistant variants, MiSeq, Next-generation Sequencing, Roche 454, Sanger Sequencing.

## HIV-1 DRUG RESISTANCE TESTING

### INTRODUCTION

With the availability of numerous antiretroviral (ARV) medications from a variety of classes and the standard use of combined antiretroviral therapy (ART) for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), there are now multiple ARV regimen options available for the treatment of persons living with HIV (PLWH). However, resistance to ARVs remains a barrier to obtaining the 90-90-90 targets set forth by UNAIDS [1]. Understanding why HIV resistance emerges, and how best we can detect and manage it, is an important step forward in ending the HIV epidemic.

Resistance to ARVs emerges as a result of the fact that HIV couples a high replication rate (approximately  $10^{10}$  virions per day) with a low fidelity reverse transcriptase enzyme ( $2.6 \times 10^{-4}$  errors/base) [2] to produce an immense variety of viral variants each day [3]. Because of these extraordinary rates, low frequency drug resistant viral variants are already present prior to the start of therapy. In this setting, any situation whereby an antiretroviral drug is present at the same time as replicating HIV may result in the selection and amplification of viral variants resistant to the drug(s) present. Examples of this include the step-wise introduction and use of monotherapy/dual therapy with ARVs as they became available in the late 1980s and 1990s, or for the prevention of mother to child HIV transmission [4, 5], the presence of pretreatment HIV drug resistance [6 - 8], and imperfect adherence to ART [9, 10]. ARV resistance to one or more drugs thus remains fairly common. In addition, the lack of access to drug resistance testing, with reported testing rates of 0-2% in developing nations, has added to the emergence of drug resistance in patients who have started on standard therapies in the setting of pretreatment drug resistance (DR), and subsequently, failed these regimens [7].

Standard HIV drug resistance testing (genotyping) is usually carried out using standard Sanger sequencing techniques capable of detecting virus variants comprising greater than or equal to 20% of the HIV viral population present in the individual [11]. With the exception of the cited study by Taffa *et al* [12] which uses an allele-specific assay, studies presented herein represent results from in-house or kit-based population-based Sanger sequencing methods.

## Rates of ARV Drug Resistance

Resistance of the HIV virus to ARV therapy may be classified into two forms. Resistance transmitted from one person to another at the time of infection is known as transmitted drug resistance (TDR), while resistance to ARVs that arises at any point after infection, usually as a result of exposure to ARV drugs is known as acquired drug resistance (ADR). In this chapter, “baseline” resistance testing will refer to any testing done prior to initiation of ARVs.

ARV drug resistance testing is an important part of clinical care. When done during acute infection or when infection is recent, resistance testing may identify cases of TDR and thus allow physicians to start patients on a fully active ARV regimen. When done before therapy initiation, but after infection has been present for many months to years, resistance testing may still be useful in identifying TDR, through predominant virus may by this time have reverted to wild type.

Later, testing identifies ADR in those individuals for whom therapy has failed and guides next line ARV regimen selection. A 2015 study by Baxter *et al.* examined baseline drug resistance testing at several international sites. Testing rates were 0.1% in Africa and 1.8% in South America.

In contrast, testing frequencies were much higher in resource-rich settings, ranging from 81.3% in the United States (US) to 86.7% in Europe and 89.9% in Australia [7].

### *Resource-Rich Settings*

Studies from resource-rich settings examining TDR by Sanger sequencing have demonstrated pre-treatment rates of resistance varying between 6.6% and 19.4% depending on study date and cohort [13 - 18]. Transmitted resistance was mainly toward nucleos(t)ide reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTI's) 0.9-9.5% and/or non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NNRTIs) 1.9-4.5%, while resistance to protease inhibitors (PIs) was less frequent ranging from 0.4-2.7% [13, 15, 16, 19, 20]. Only one of these studies reported resistance to integrase inhibitors (INSTI) with 1/461 patients, exhibiting a major integrase strand transfer inhibitor (INSTI) mutation [17]. In some resource-rich settings, rates of TDR decreased over time, while in others, rates have stayed the same. Specifically, in the large European CASCADE cohort study, the estimated TDR prevalence was 19.4% in 1996, a number that decreased significantly to 8.5% by 2012 [13]. Similarly, in a study from the United Kingdom by Tostevin *et al.* [14], TDR decreased over time from 8.1% in 2010 to 6.6% in 2012 ( $p=0.02$ ), while a study by D'Costa *et al.* [17] from Australia reported TDR rates of 11.4% from 2005-

## CHAPTER 3

## Current and Promising Multiclass Drug Regimens and Long-Acting Formulation Drugs in HIV Therapy

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**Abstract:** In HIV-1 therapies, dual-drug and triple-drug combinations of antiretroviral therapy (ART) have radically improved the prognosis of HIV-1 infected people. The clinical usage of drug combinations has established high efficacy with constant viral load repression, saving T cells, and low adverse drug reactions compared to mono drug therapy treatment and thus has drawn intensive attention from researchers and pharmaceutical enterprises for HIV treatment and prevention. The switching of antiretroviral regimens from one combination to another is relatively easier for patients experiencing adverse effects or drug toxicities or requesting modification or simplification of their regimen. In addition, the choice of the combination regimen reduces viral resistance drastically when compared to the mono drug regimen. Several two- and three-drug complete regimens like Delstrigo, Complera, Stribild, Dovato, Juluca, etc., were approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the treatment of HIV-1 infection in adults and children. Multiclass combination drug regimens, which include varied classes of antiretroviral agents that work by interrupting the two or more enzymes required for the life cycle of HIV replication, have proved effective in the treatment of HIV infections, resulting in the approval of novel combination regimens for antiretroviral therapy. For complete virologic inhibition, antiretroviral combination regimens should include at least two or preferably three active drugs from two or more classes of nucleoside/nucleotide reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs or NtRTIs), Protease inhibitors (PIs), and Integrase Strand Transfer Inhibitors (INSTIs). At present, several researchers are focused on developing newer, long-acting formulations of different classes of mono- and dual-antiretroviral drugs. Recently, the first and only complete long-acting regimen of extended-release injectable suspension of cabotegravir and rilpivirine by intramuscular gluteal was approved once monthly for HIV treatment by the FDA.

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Several antiretroviral drugs are under investigation in preclinical and clinical studies through various formulations, such as implants, injectables, intravenous, and subcutaneous. This book chapter aims to summarize the currently available multiple drug combinations information and the development of long-acting antiretroviral drugs for HIV treatment and prevention in the last two decades.

**Keywords:** AIDS, Antiretroviral therapy, HIV, Long-acting therapy, Three-drug combination therapy, Two-drug combination therapy.

## INTRODUCTION

Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) is caused by a human retrovirus, Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and has been considered a deadly disease since its discovery in 1983 [1]. To date, 79.3 million people have been infected by the virus globally, with around 36.3 million deaths. The demographic data shows about 0.7% of the currently infected patients fall in the age group of 15–49 years, with a varying burden of the epidemic observed in different regions around the globe. According to the UNAIDS report, in 2020, 37.7 million people were living with HIV. Among them, 36 million were adults, and 1.7 million were children, indicating these infections are a major threat to humans all over the world. In 2020, 20.7 million people had HIV (54%) in Eastern and Southern Africa, 4.9 million (13%) in Western and Central Africa, 5.8 million (15%) in Asia and the Pacific, and 2.2 million (6%) in Western and Central Europe and North America. Young adults in the age group of 15-24 and women are at a higher probability of risk. There are approximately 4,500 new infections every day arising among adults and children. The human immune system weakens after 10–15 years of infection due to the entry of HIV into the host cell followed by replication with the help of the host cell mechanism and ultimately killing the T-cells, giving way to opportunistic infections such as tuberculosis, pneumonia, herpes simplex, kaposi's sarcoma, and coccidioidomycosis. The devastated CD4+ T-cells are the characteristic feature of AIDS that leads to the death of a patient infected with HIV [2]. HIV is effectively transmitted from one individual to another individual by sexual contact that takes place on the mucosal surfaces of the anus, rectum, vagina, and semen secretions containing the HIV. Pneumocystis pneumonia, cachexia in the form of HIV wasting syndrome, and esophageal candidiasis are the most frequent early symptoms occurring in AIDS patients [3, 4]. Sometimes, viral-induced cancers like Kaposi's sarcoma, Burkitt's lymphoma, primary central nervous system lymphoma, and cervical cancer develops among patients with AIDS [5 - 7].

Although there have been intense efforts towards the development of drugs used effectively for the treatment of HIV infections, several drugs fail to function due to acquired mutations in the virus and the development of resistant strains. To

overcome viral mutations and drug resistance, combination treatment regimens called combined antiretroviral combination therapy (cART) are being explored. For effective treatment of resistant strains, several promising clinical trials are currently in progress. One of the rational approaches to effectively combating resistant strains of HIV is by using the structural information of the target protein. Through the knowledge of the binding pocket and the important amino acid residues at the HIV target site, drugs could be designed effectively to treat mutant strains that have resistance to routine drug therapy.

## **Key Drug-Targets in Blocking the HIV Replication Cycle**

### ***Genomic Information***

HIV-1 belongs to a *lentivirus* from the family of *Retroviridae*. It consists of approximately 9800 base pairs and is flanked by long terminal repeats (LTR). The genes of HIV are present in the central region and encode nine functional genes, which can be classified into three structural proteins, Gag, Pol, and Env; the two regulatory proteins, Tat and Rev; and four accessory proteins, Vpu, Vpr, Vif, and Nef. Among the structural proteins, the Gag polyprotein is further processed into six protein domains, which include matrix (MA), capsid (CA), nucleocapsid (NC), and p1, p2, and p6 spacer peptides. The genomic information of protease (PR), reverse transcriptase (RT), and integrase (IN) is derived from the proteolytic processing of Gag-Pol. The *Env* gene contains a signal peptide (SP), gp120, and gp41 [8].

### ***Replication Cycle of HIV***

The development of mature viral and multiplication are carried out at various stages in the replication cycle of HIV (Fig. 1). The early replication cycle starts from the outside membrane viral envelope proteins such as glycoproteins, gp120 and transmembrane gp41, protein binding towards the C-C chemokine receptor type 5 (CCR5 or R5) or CXCR4 co-receptor in T-lymphocyte cells. The interface of the viral and host cell proteins fuse and further allows the entry of the viral nucleocapsid into the host cell and liberates the RNA strands along with the key enzymes such as reverse transcriptase (RT), integrase (IN), and protease (PR) for replication. RT is one of the crucial enzymes responsible for the reverse transcription of the retroviral single-stranded RNA genome into viral double-stranded DNA (dsDNA) at the polymerase and ribonuclease H domains. Consequently, dsDNA as proviral DNA integrates into the host genome by the viral integrase enzyme. Once the cell gets activated, it stimulates the transcription of pro-viral DNA into viral messenger RNA, commanding the cell to start producing the new building blocks for long-chain HIV proteins. Assembly occurs at the cell membrane and generates an immature virus that buds into the

## Role of Nanotechnology in HIV Diagnosis and Prognosis

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**Abstract:** The diagnosis and prognosis of HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) infection has been revolutionized through advances and development in the field of nanotechnology. Since its onset in the early 1980s, HIV has gradually attained 'pandemic' status and increased the need for efficacy in the rapid identification and treatment of AIDS (*Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome*). Despite the triple-drug therapy initiated by the next decade in the 1990s, the number of affected individuals increased to 2.8 million, and developing countries faced this crisis on multiple fronts. Today, a range of antiretroviral drugs are available with reduced toxicities and improved pharmacokinetic and pharmacodynamic profiles, along with improvement in diagnostic tools and kits, which have been made possible largely due to the advancement of nanotechnology. We have divided this chapter into the following three sections:

- HIV pathogenesis
- Nanotechnology and the need for innovation
- Role of nanotechnology in HIV diagnostics, drug delivery, and therapy

In section I, the disease characteristics of HIV infection and the viral life cycle are discussed, and the possible target sites for therapeutic intervention are also assessed. The second section delves into the basics of nanoscience and the myriad of possibilities that it offers. The pros and cons of nanotechnology-based therapeutics, along with the need for newer, rapid, and realistic approaches to tackle HIV infection, are explored. Section III examines the various advancements and trends in the diagnosis of the disease condition through nanotechnology-based applications, materials, and tools. This section then progresses to the critical aspects of drug delivery and therapy and

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concludes by outlining the potential for the development of future nano-based antiretroviral therapies.

**Keywords:** Antiretroviral Drug Development, HIV, Infectious Diseases, Nanomedicine, Nanotechnology, Viruses.

**INTRODUCTION**

Infectious diseases predominantly of viral origin have been detrimental for many centuries; HIV (*Human Immunodeficiency Virus*) grew into a pandemic during the 1990s, leading to serious complications on multiple fronts, such as healthcare and socio-economic, ultimately affecting the quality of life of the people. HIV primarily targets white blood cells, lowers the CD4<sup>+</sup> T cell count to a critical level, and eventually progresses to the clinical stage of AIDS (*Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome*). AIDS impedes effective immune response, thereby leading to the vulnerability of opportunistic infections and cancer. Therefore, without therapeutic interventions, HIV infection rapidly progresses to AIDS and causes death.

Initial descriptions and reports of the HIV-1 (Human Immunodeficiency Virus type I) were provided in 1983 [1 - 3] and HIV-2 in 1986 [4]; these two types of virus have since been identified as the primary cause of AIDS. Approximately, 38 million people across the globe were affected by HIV/AIDS in 2019, and an estimated 1.7 million individuals worldwide acquired HIV infections in 2019, marking a 23% decline in new HIV infections since 2010 (Fig. 1).

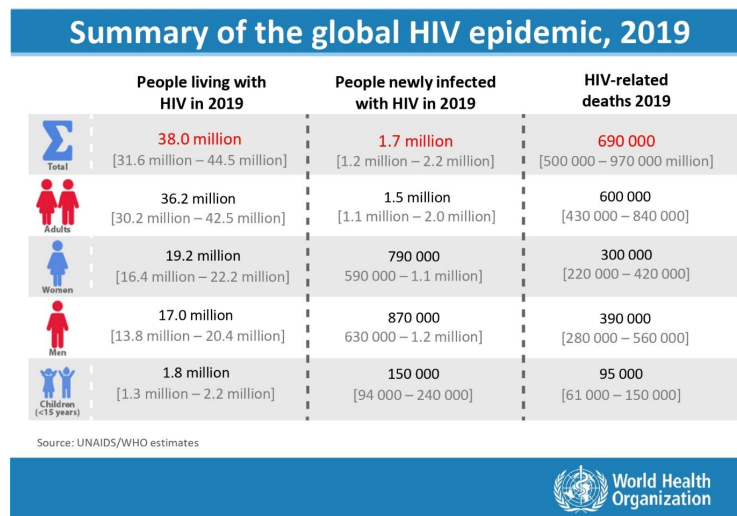
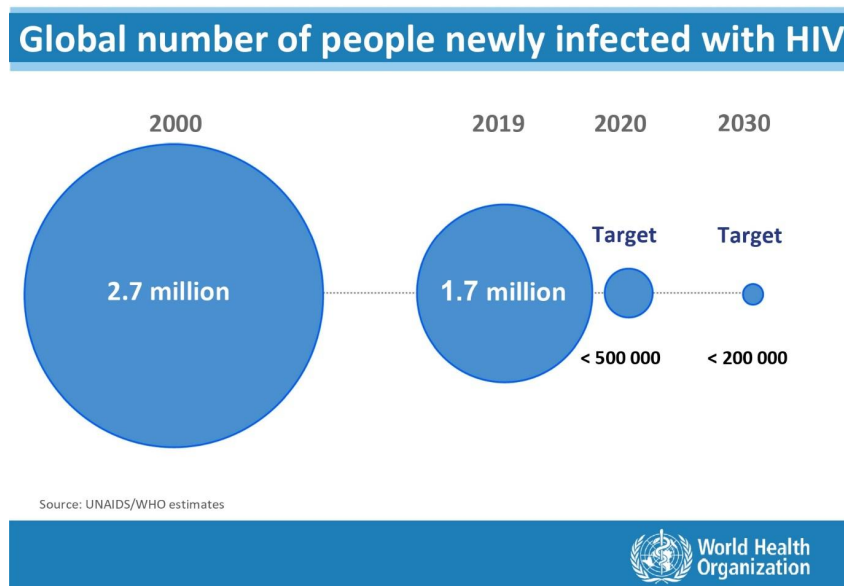


Fig. (1). Global HIV Epidemic (WHO Report - 2020).

The availability and accessibility of HIV testing, diagnostic devices, and medicines amongst the vulnerable population and communities is a key objective to eradicate HIV and AIDS in the long term. Only 81% of people infected with HIV globally knew their HIV status in 2019, and the remaining 19% (about 7.1 million people) still need access to HIV testing services. As of the end of 2019, 25.4 million people with HIV (67%) were accessing antiretroviral therapy (ART) globally, which leaves a whopping 12.6 million people still awaiting any kind of therapeutic interventions and care. Due to the advancements in HIV care and therapy, AIDS-related deaths have been reduced by 60% since their peak in 2004 [5].

Currently, there is no cure for HIV, but treatment with antiretroviral therapy is capable of preventing the rapid advancement of AIDS. HIV medicines significantly prolong the expected lifespan of the infected population. However, studies and clinical observations over the many years have indicated the presence of HIV in other organs of the body, besides cells of the immune system [6]. Also, the emergence of resistant virus strains is a major challenge to the containment of the disease. It is reported that 5%-78% of the patients infected with HIV-1 and receiving antiretroviral therapy are resistant to at least one of the currently available antiretroviral drugs. Thus, there is a need for newer antiretroviral agents to overcome the drug resistance and target different stages of the viral lifecycle [7]. Fig. (2) shows the global population of newly infected individuals with a projected decreasing target through the year 2030.



**Fig. (2).** Number of individuals affected with HIV Globally.



## CHAPTER 5

## Preventive and Therapeutic Features of Combination Therapy for HIV

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**Abstract:** The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a retrovirus characterized by a reverse transcriptase enzyme and is known for causing acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), a chronic condition with progressive failure of the immune system. HIV poses a major health issue globally, infecting cells containing CD4<sup>+</sup> and CCR5 or CXCR4 receptor sites, *i.e.*, T-lymphocytes, macrophages, monocytes, and dendritic cells. HIV infects the T-lymphocytes by suppressing the immune system leading to several pathogenic infections, thus critically demands healthy measures to strengthen the immune system. For this purpose, diverse classes of drugs have been developed that effectively decrease the viral load in the patients, inhibiting the replicative cycle of HIV at a specific point. These specific inhibitors (drugs) may include inhibitors of entry/fusion, protease, nucleotide reverse transcriptase, non-nucleotide reverse transcriptase, and integrase. This chapter provides an overview of the drugs used to treat HIV, their mechanism of action and side effects, as well as their dosage recommended for the treatment of HIV. Notable examples are zidovudine, abacavir, lamivudine, didanosine, tenofovir, stavudine, emtricitabine, nevirapine, delavirdine, efavirenz, etravirine, dolutegravir, bictegravir, raltegravir, cobicistat, indinavir, ritonavir, nelfinavir, saquinavir, darunavir, atazanavir, lopinavir, tipranavir, fusion inhibitors (enfuvirtide) and chemokine CCR5 receptor antagonist. These drugs are administered to HIV patients throughout their life mostly as a combination therapy as HIV can become resistant to these drugs after some period. Additionally, these drugs have several side effects such as nausea, dizziness, liver diseases, kidney disorders, and heart diseases. Many of the above-mentioned side effects are temporary and are resolved spontaneously. However, some of these (hepatic, renal, or cardiac failure) can lead to the death of the patient. Another drawback of antiretroviral drugs is their latency for HIV and its reactivation. By determining and controlling all the factors that regulate the gene expression of HIV, such as HSP90, required for HIV gene expression, reactivation of HIV can be stopped from latency. Moreover, the latency of

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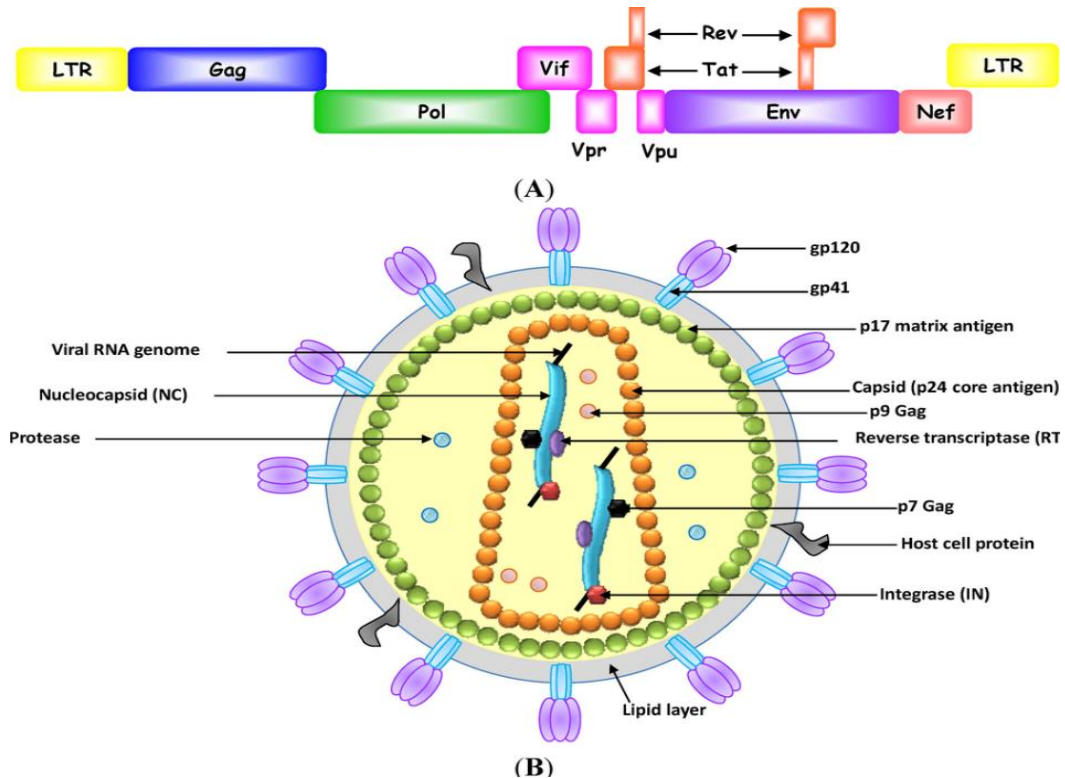
HIV can also be controlled by studying its mechanism, thus enhancing the effectiveness of antiretroviral treatment (ART). The development of plant-based drugs exhibiting improved inhibition of HIV replication compared to available antiretroviral drugs has also been reported.

**Keywords:** Antiretroviral drugs, Antiretroviral treatment, Cardiac failure, Human immunodeficiency virus, Macrophages, T-lymphocytes.

## INTRODUCTION

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is an enveloped retrovirus strongly associated with the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). The disease started in Africa and is now present across the globe, with 38.9 million infected people. As HIV is a member of the *Lentivirus* genus that belongs to the *Retroviridae* family, so, like all other retroviruses, it also contains a reverse transcriptase enzyme that was discovered by Baltimore and Temin in 1970 [1 - 4]. HIV contains a diploid single-stranded positive-sense RNA genome that encodes 2 envelopes, 3 structural, 6 accessory proteins, and 3 enzymes inside the host cell [3, 5]. Based on the arrangement of the genome, HIV has two types, *i.e.*, HIV-1 (genomic organization represented in Fig. (1a) and HIV-2, and the former one is more prevalent and virulent and is transmitted by sexual contact, body fluids, mother to a child when mother viral load is high, and by contaminated syringes or other surgical instruments [3, 6]. On entering the host, the virus mainly infects the cells that express CD4<sup>+</sup> receptors on their cell membranes, such as T-lymphocytes, macrophages, and dendritic cells. When HIV infects and replicates inside T-lymphocyte, it causes the death of T-lymphocytes resulting in the decline of immune functions, and consequently, many opportunistic infections can occur to the patient. HIV can also infect brain cells where it can cause encephalopathy [7].

HIV patients can be treated by antiretroviral therapy (ART), which includes drugs that are given in various combinations (two, three, or four). These nucleic acid aptamers target the HIV-1 genome and several proteins like Gag, Tat, Rev, integrase, and reverse transcriptase, *etc* [1] (Fig. 1b). As ART is given to the patients throughout their life so primary infection due to HIV is reduced to a greater extent, but the threat that develops is the enhanced risk of secondary infections due to the associated side effects caused by the long-term use of antiretroviral drugs [6]. These toxic effects include heart diseases, renal infections, and nervous disorders that are the cause of death among many HIV patients [9].



**Fig. (1).** a) Genomic organization of HIV-1; b) virion of HIV-1 and the potential targets. Reproduced from an open-access source [8].

## Replication Cycle of HIV

Here is a brief description of the replicative cycle of HIV that will help us to understand the mechanism of action of each drug used to treat HIV patients.

### Attachment and Entry

The first step in replication is the binding of HIV with CD4<sup>+</sup> receptor that is present on the cell surface of monocytes, macrophages, lymphocytes, microglial cells of CNS, and dendritic cells. Under normal conditions, CD4<sup>+</sup> receptors are used for the recognition of any foreign antigen by T-cells, but the same receptors can also serve as a portal of entry into the host cell for HIV. As HIV is an enveloped virus, so its lipoprotein envelope is basically responsible for its attachment to the receptor site on the host cell surface by utilizing envelope proteins like gp (glycoprotein) 120 and gp41 [10]. First of all, gp120 attaches to the CD4<sup>+</sup> receptor, and because of this binding, the viral envelope undergoes a change that actually refers to the change in the gp120 resulting in the exposure of a specific binding site allowing gp120 to glue with chemokine receptors. So far,

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