

Study: HIV patients could live 24 years

Care in that time may cost \$600,000

By Mike Stobbe
Associated Press

ATLANTA — An American diagnosed with the AIDS virus can expect to live for about 24 years on average, and the cost of health care over that time is more than \$600,000, new research indicates.

Both life expectancy and the cost of care have risen from earlier estimates, mainly because of expensive and effective drug therapies, said Bruce Schackman, the study's lead author.

The research found that the average annual cost of care is about \$25,200 — nearly 40 percent higher than a commonly cited estimate from the late 1990s.

The new research also updates other studies from the 1990s, when life expectancy for HIV-infected people was closer to 10 years.

The study could influence how much state and federal governments appropriate for HIV and AIDS care and prevention in the future, some HIV policy experts said.

"They're going to have to

take into account medical advances that have extended people's lives," agreed Schackman, assistant professor of public health at New York's Weill Cornell Medical College.

The study appears in the November edition of the peer-reviewed journal *Medical Care*.

A 1993 estimate of life expectancy for a symptomless person infected with HIV was less than seven years.

But since the mid-1990s, about two dozen HIV-fighting antiretroviral drugs have come onto the market that have essentially turned HIV from a death sentence into a chronic disease.

The study's researchers drew most of their data from 18 medical practices across the United States that provide care for 14,000 patients. The researchers looked at the records of about 7,000 of those patients.

They used a computer simulation model to project HIV medical care costs and concluded the average lifetime cost of HIV care is \$618,000 per person.

That is roughly equivalent to lifetime cost estimates for heart disease and some other chronic conditions in women, who incur more costs than men because they live longer, the researchers said.