AbbVie's HIV Drug Aluvia Seen as Potential Treatment for Coronavirus

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More than 80 people have died from the coronavirus in China. The Chinese government is turning to a drug developed by AbbVie for HIV patients as a potential treatment for the outbreak that has reached the shores of the United States.

AbbVie said it was donating more than one million dollars’ worth of Aluvia, a combination of lopinavir and ritonavir as an ad-hoc treatment for pneumonia that is associated with the outbreak. The Chinese government suggested last week that taking two lopinavir/ritonavir pills and inhaling a dose of nebulized alpha-interferon twice a day could benefit these patients, Reuters reported. There are more than 2,000 known cases of the coronavirus in China. The illness has caused parts of China to grind to a halt as health officials seek to contain the spread of the virus.

The decision to use AbbVie’s medicine came after a noted respiratory expert at Peking University First Hospital in Beijing said he was given the HIV drugs to fight the virus after he contracted it following a visit to Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province in central China where the virus is thought to have originated. Wan Guangfa came down with the virus after interacting
with coronavirus patients. He told China News Week that the HIV treatments worked for him.

The coronavirus family includes the common cold as well as viruses that cause more serious illnesses, such as SARS that spread from China to more than a dozen countries in 2002-03 and killed about 800 people. Also, the virus is similar to Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), which developed from camels. The virus infects the lungs, and symptoms start with a fever and cough. It can progress to shortness of breath and breathing difficulties leading to pneumonia.

Aluvia is thought to be a potential treatment for the coronavirus due to its ability to block a protease that the virus needs to replicate within the human body. AbbVie’s drug has previously been tested in patients with SARS and MERS, which are similar viruses, reported Endpoints.

Other drugmakers are also responding. Gilead Sciences is looking at its Ebola virus drug remdesivir, an antiviral, as a potential coronavirus treatment, The Motley Fool reported. Moderna also has a treatment for the virus under investigation. The company received a grant from the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations to investigate a treatment for the virus. Inovio also received a grant from CEPI to develop a potential vaccine.
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