

Stories of Hope: HIV/AIDS



It was perhaps the biggest moment of **Loring Leeds'** life, but as he lay waiting for doctors to return his stem cells to his body, Leeds realized it was a signature moment for the crowd in the room as well.

It was 1998, and surrounding him were the doctors and scientists who had developed a treatment for non-Hodgkin lymphoma in AIDS patients—something most of the medical community at the time considered pointless and hopeless. But Leeds' stem cell treatment was even more dramatic, because some of his cells were genetically modified to express an enzyme researchers hoped would short-circuit AIDS.

"There was this deafening silence, and I realized that moment was the culmination of their life's work," Leeds said. Today, Leeds, an artist, is cancer free, and though the AIDS enzyme treatment did not work, his HIV is undetectable. The treatment he received was a precursor to the HIV work now being carried out by two CIRM-funded projects at Calimmune and City of Hope/Sangamo BioSciences, both of which are now in clinical trials.

"These people are the most dedicated, the most compassionate, the most passionate people I've ever met," Leeds said. "They are visionaries. They are the best humanity has to offer. I truly believe our best hope for better treatment, and ultimately a cure, will come from the hands and hearts and minds of these astonishing people."

- Watch the Spotlight on HIV/AIDS talks
- Read about CIRM funding for HIV/ADS research

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