

UF researchers study TB epidemic

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University of Florida and Indian scientists are studying a protein they believe might help protect against tuberculosis and give patients an easier recovery.

The scientists say alcohol consumption likely reduces the amount of the protective protein called heme oxygenase 1 and that weakens the body's defenses against TB, said Dr. Veena Antony, a UF professor of pulmonary medicine.

She says researchers hope to pinpoint the role of alcoholism in the global epidemic by studying a population of HIV- and tuberculosis-infected patients in India. The scientists are collecting data for a project funded by the National Institutes of Health and hope to have answers within two to three years, Antony said.

TB currently kills someone every six seconds around the world, she said.

The epidemic is currently more prevalent in resource-poor nations such as India. But with immigrants unknowingly carrying bacteria that cause TB into the United States each year, the crisis could spread to U.S. soil if left untended, Antony warned.

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