Biomarkers May Signal Early Transplant Rejection

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A team of researchers in the Department of Pediatrics at Boston Children's Hospital and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center have discovered a set of biomarkers that could detect early signs of chronic heart transplant rejection — a process that is often undetectable until function of the heart has been irreversibly compromised. The team, led by Kevin P. Daly, MD, and David M. Briscoe, MD, of the Transplant Research Program (TRP) at Boston Children's Hospital, and S. Ananth Karumanchi, MD, of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, published their findings online in the Journal of Heart and Lung Transplantation.

The discovery of such short-term markers provides an opportunity to intervene upon a recipient's transplanted heart before failure occurs. Short-term rejection has largely been ameliorated over the past 45 years, since the first heart transplant, due to the advent of immunosuppressants such as cyclosporine. However, long-term, chronic rejection is the major form of rejection nowadays as patients are living longer. What is key about this discovery is that short-term biomarkers may indicate early chronic rejection. Furthermore, it may lead to discoveries of long-term biomarkers to detect chronic rejection. According to Briscoe, director of the TRP and a nephrologist, "All transplant patients eventually progress to chronic rejection…It's a slow process that evolves over years."

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