## Health Views: The Real AIDS Bogeyman

ome AIDS activists are impossible to satisfy. While pharmaceutical researchers toil to treat and prevent AIDS, assorted protesters demand so much that drug companies are throwing their hands up in exasperation. Perfectionist groups literally have halted promising drug trials. These militants should desist before they jeopardize even more human lives.

This battle between "patient advocates" and drug manufacturers rages primarily in Africa and Asia, where AIDS spreads as quickly as juicy gossip. Because the Third World includes so many AIDS patients, and drugs can be studied most efficiently where diseases move swiftly, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Centers for Disease Control, among others, chose Cambodia and Cameroon to test Tenofovir, Gilead Science's HIV-prevention pill.

As Marilyn Chase explained in the May 18 Wall Street Journal, activists insisted that researchers guarantee volunteers "developedworld standards of prevention" and lifelong access to AIDS drugs if they became infected. Normally, such individuals would visit local



Facing such outrage, researchers canceled a Cambodian study last August and suspended one in Cameroon last February. The 2006 goal for determining Tenofovir's effectiveness has slid to 2007. In those additional twelve months, five million people could needlessly contract HIV. How many will AIDS kill in the same time frame?

"What the developed world's activists are doing to the developing world is tantamount to murder or genocide," says Congress of Racial Equality spokesman Niger Innis. He has visited Kenya, Nigeria, Sudan, and Thailand to study global health issues. Innis

several drug companies. They did the same thing two years earlier in Barcelona," says Abner Mason, executive director of the AIDS Responsibility Project. "This type of activism slows and, in some cases, stops the development of new drugs. This ultimately will mean that millions of people will have nowhere to turn when they need therapy."

Drug companies are responding to these vandals by retiring their test tubes. Says one pharmaceutical executive: "Activists who hound drug companies, and the incentive system that underpins drug discovery, are directly responsible for depressing R&D for HIV. From a peak of 125 drugs in development in 1998-1999, we are now down to around 80, a 36 percent decline. This is a direct consequence of hostile, unrelenting attacks on the industry. No matter what industry does, no good deed goes unpunished in HIV/AIDS."

"We are seeing 27 percent fewer companies working in HIV research than there were six years ago," says American Enterprise Institute resident fellow Roger Bate. "Companies

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clinics. Outside demonstrators wanted counseling, condoms, and free needles for Thai intravenousdrug users, plus bleach to sterilize old needles.

"In every war, there are those who collaborate with the enemy," declares an Act Up-Paris manifesto. "AIDS too has its collaborators: [Including] those who see the epidemic as an opportunity to make money."

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Act Up-Paris's idealism sometimes disappears. At a 2004 AIDS conference, it hurled fake blood at and destroyed Gilead's display case. "Gilead's greed kills," protesters bellowed.

adds: "If AIDS researchers waited for environmental and health standards in developing nations to reach those of the West before they conducted much-needed AIDS trials, you could kiss goodbye a generation of Africans. You can't wait for purified Poland Spring water to extinguish a fire raging in your house right now."

Act Up-Paris and the European AIDS Treatment Group even managed to terminate French, German, and Spanish studies of Maraviroc, a prospective AIDS therapy. The group argued that highly immunosuppressed HIV-positive patients should not try this Pfizer drug as a first treatment.

"At last July's World AIDS Conference in Bangkok, I saw people splatter red paint on and trash the information booths of don't like to be told that they have blood on their hands and that they back genocide. If they are not making money on their research, they're unlikely to keep funding it ... These drugs will not be like Lipitor, which made \$10.9 billion last year. Compared to such a blockbuster drug, even the best AIDS drug will not earn anywhere near that kind of money."

While activists scream about profits, AIDS silently kills Africans and Asians by the millions. ▼

Matthew Veritas Tsien is the Vice-President of Development for the Florida Gold Coast Log Cabin Republicans in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. f you've never been tested, or if you've had unprotected sex or shared a n

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