Cocktail Hour

Activists cry, “Put up your nukes!”

March 1, 1997 By Walter Armstrong and Ronnilyn Pustil

For those excluded from the miracle of protease cocktails, there’s good and bad news. The good news-Glaxo Wellcome’s new nucleoside blockbuster, abacavir, or 1592, is right around the corner. The bad news? According to *The Wall Street Journal*, that corner is at least a year and a half away.

The skinny on abacavir, which has been in the pipeline for seven years, was too hot to keep secret. It’s said to be 10 times more potent than AZT, without all the nasty side effects.

Activists charge Glaxo with major foot-dragging in an effort to protect the sales of AZT and 3TC, the drug’s nuke cousins. The combined AZT/3TC revenue is expected to hit $600 million this year and could exceed $1 billion by 1998. The drug giant hit paydirt as thousands of patients rush to build a “cocktail” regimen, starting with AZT/3TC and adding one of the antiprotease drugs. But no one is likely to choose either nuke over the virile young abacavir. Because abacavir will be combined with other drugs in “cocktail” therapy, Glaxo says the safety trials will take at least 18 months. Fair enough, say activists. Meantime, they demand Glaxo make abacavir available for “compassionate use.”

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