



Disobedience School

How to override a global patent

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Touted as an HIV prevention leader in the '90s, Thailand has since slashed its prevention funds by two-thirds, contributing to a surge in new infections. Rising med costs are further undermining its pledge to guarantee HIV drug access. In late November, however, the new military rulers announced plans to produce generic efavirenz (Sustiva in the U.S.) without consulting its foreign patent-holder, Merck—meaning that they could afford the AIDS med for 100,000 people, instead of just 17,000. A 2001 international trade pact lets nations issue such patent-flouting licenses to combat health emergencies. AIDS advocates applauded the Thai move. Merck denounced it as “a last resort” then offered to voluntarily reduce the cost. At press time, however, Thailand was holding fast to its rogue regimen.

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