Good China

February 1, 2003 By Laura Whitehorn

In a timely turnaround, the globe’s most populous nation hit some HIV highs after decades of denial and a year in the hot seat: In December, China’s first generic med, a form of ddI, hit the market. BMS conceded that its Videx copyright covers only the tablet form, thus exempting the powder version produced by Desano Shanghai. The little pharma expects to produce two more antiretrovirals to mix a cocktail for about $600 -- compared to the patented pills’ price tag of $10,000. But the firecrackers aren’t flaring yet: HIVer Lao Ren told Reuters that workers and peasants like him only earn about $270 a year. Also in December, China topped the World AIDS Day charts by announcing an end to its ban on condom ads and the debut of stigma-smashing HIV TV videos for its 1.3 billion citizens. Experts fear 10 to 20 million may have HIV by 2010.

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