New Drug Watch

A new nuke, a gen-two protease and more

February 1, 1999 By Tim Horn

Drug/Company: Abacavir (Ziagen)/Glaxo Wellcome
For: HIV
Status: Approved by the FDA last November
Standard Treatment: Highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART)
Notes: A nucleoside analogue, or "nuke" (like AZT and 3TC). Abacavir combined with two other nukes seems as effective (in the treatment naive) as protease combos, at least for 24 weeks. Dangerous hypersensitivity (rash, fever) that precludes taking it again is possible.
From the gut of PWA Stephen Gendin: "How best to use abacavir is unclear. It has limited efficacy for the treatment-experienced, so you'll probably have no option but to use it as part of your first combo."

Drug/Company: ABT-378/Abbott Laboratories
For: HIV
Status: Phase II trials under way
Standard Treatment: HAART
Notes: The first "second generation" protease inhibitor in development, ABT-378 shows signs of a unique resistance profile (it is active against ritonavir [Norvir]-resistant HIV) and, when combined with a very low dose of ritonavir, the drug may only need to be taken once a day.
From the gut of PWA Stephen Gendin: "I'm anxiously awaiting this drug for my own use. Still, caution is in order since claims of unique resistance profiles are as common as they are overstated."

Drug/Company: Pentafuside (T-20)/Trimeris, Inc.
For: HIV
Status: Phase II trials under way
Standard Treatment: HAART
Notes: A fusion inhibitor, pentafuside prevents HIV from "fusing" with, and infecting, CD4 cells. In one 12-person study, PWAs taking 100 mg twice daily without other drugs had a 1.5-log reduction in viral load and a 52 CD4-cell increase after 14 days. Infused automatically by portable pump.
From the gut of PWA Stephen Gendin: "Finally, a new class of drug that could work for everyone, regardless of antiretroviral history. The drawback: Pentafuside needs to be infused."

Drug/Company: Cidofovir gel (Forvade)/Gilead Sciences
For: Herpes simplex
Status: Compassionate-use program; New Drug Application filed
Standard Treatment: Acyclovir; valacyclovir, famciclovir
Notes: Approximately half of PWAs using this topical drug had either a complete or a partial response in their herpes lesions after 15 days; all PWAs enrolled in this study had been unresponsive to previous therapy with acyclovir.
From the gut of PWA Stephen Gendin: “Herpes can get out of control in people with HIV, so more treatments are desperately needed. This gel is definitely worth watching.”

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