New Med on the Shelf

January 1, 2004 By Marissa Pareles

Lexiva (fosamprenavir calcium)

GlaxoSmithKline/Vertex

>>Class Protease inhibitor (PI).
A prodrug (meaning it improves absorption) of the PI Agenerase (amprenavir).

>>Task To stop HIV from reproducing.

>>Ticket About $730/month.

>>Pros First PI with no food or water restrictions. If you're new to meds it can be taken as a once-daily with a Norvir (ritonavir) booster, or twice a day with or without the booster. (HAART old-timers take it twice a day with Norvir.) Fewer side effects and easier dosing than Agenerase.

>>Cons Sometimes needs the Norvir booster even if taken twice daily. Like other PIs, you can't combine it with many drugs, including birth control pills. Can cause diarrhea, nausea, rash and, rarely, severe skin disease. Interaction and efficacy research isn't finished.

>>HIV vets weigh in Treatment activists emphasize it's not a new drug class—not even really a new drug. Tim Horn calls Lexiva "a slightly improved version of Agenerase (though there's only been one short-term study comparing the two), with fewer pills and short-term side effects. It gives other PIs some competition in the convenience department."

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