Pipeline Dreams

124 new meds on the move

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In 1987, AZT was the only med to treat HIV. Last year saw protease inhibitors for tots and a dandy new two-in-one drug. This year the store may hold much more. A survey by the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (P*h*RMA), which represents the nation's leading drug and biotech research firms, revealed 124 new HIV medicines and vaccines in clinical trials or under FDA review. These meds-in-progress will add to the roster of 50 drugs already approved to treat AIDS and its associated illnesses. Among them are 40 antivirals (including protease inhibitors), 11 anti-infectives to fight opportunistic infections and five gene therapies designed to scramble cell DNA to increase resistance to the virus. When will they hatch? "We've seen an incredible improvement in FDA-review time," said P*h*RMA's Heather Kolasch. "A lot of the AIDS therapies are on the fast track, and approval time has been decreased to about 18 months for a new drug."

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