Take Five

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In May, UNAIDS urged five companies to say they'd cut the prices of anti-HIV drugs in poor countries. After many press releases (and even more free publicity), few additional details have been released. A brief look at the facts and possible pitfalls:

Boehringer-Ingelheim, Germany
Price Tag: TBA
Active Ingredients: Five years of free nevirapine, but only to prevent mom-to-babe transmission. Countries must ask for the drug and meet the World Bank's definition of a developing nation in order to avoid any coloniastic overtones.
Warning: But hey, it only covers mothers and kids using the drug, not other HIVers.

Bristol-Meyers Squibb, U.S.
Price Tag: $100 mil over five years (started in 99)
Active Ingredients: "Secure the Future" program targets women and children in South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho, and Swaziland; generally credited with setting a good example for other drug companies.
Warning: Locals say that they want more community initiatives and lower drug prices, not phsician trainings and clinical trials.

Glaxo Wellcome, Great Britain
Price Tag: TBA
Active Ingredients: Price cuts for Combivir, from $16 to $2 per day in developing nations, and a free start-up supply of AZT for pregnant women.
Warning: Activists say even $2 is more than the 40 cents it costs to make the drug generically. And once the initial cache of AZT is used, moms will have to pay, too.

Merck & Co., INC., US
Price Tag: $50 mil
Active Ingredients: The Gates Foundation will match the donation to improve medical infrastructure in Botswana. Crixivan and Sustiva will be offered free in 2001.
Warning: We're waiting to find out how many people will get the drugs.

Roche Labs, Switzerland
Price Tag: TBA
Active Ingredients: Countries to provide Fortovase, Ivirase, and Vireacept at a reduced

(undisclosed) cost in some nations, say reps.
Warning: No other details had been released at press time.

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