The Price Wars

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Recently, the HIV community has been bombarded by rapid-fire announcements of enormous wholesale prices for both new and old medicines: DuPont Pharma's Sustiva ($4,730 annually, for above other non-nukes); Schering-Plough's hepatitis C treatment, Rebetron (two separate drugs sold only as a combo--$16,940); and Agouron's protease inhibitor, Viracept (hiked 4.6 percent to $7,000), with Glaxo Wellcome reportedly planning a protease-range price tag for its new nuke, Ziagen. The common thread here is the unacknowledged monopolist mantra: Charge whatever the market will bear. The result will be accelerated cutbacks by AIDS Drug Assistance Programs, Medicaid and HMOs. Drug makers claim that research and production costs require sky-high prices, but until they open their books, skepticism is in order. Advocacy groups are challenging this price-gouging, but relief will only come when their voices are amplified a hundredfold by those of everyday community folk.

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