Wellcome to My Nightmare

Foot-dragging on 1592 provokes protests and boycott

October 1, 1997 By John Hammond

Glaxo's welcome is worn out. Activist demand for its long-delayed drugs - nucleoside 1592 (abacavir) and the anti-protease 141W94 - has hit critical mass. Last spring saw protests at New York's POZ Life Expo and at the opening of a Glaxo factory in Toronto, Canada. Then seven ACT UP/New York members were arrested after seizing Glaxo's investor-relations office. Even AIDS czar Sandy Thurman chimed in, asking Glaxo honchos about the holdup. Finally a who's who of AIDS groups worldwide announced a boycott of Zantac, the company's heartburn mega-seller. San Francisco city supervisor Tom Ammiano, who backed the boycott, said, "What I find repulsive is that as they're taking their time, people are dying." Ammiano was on hand in July when activists gathered at the Pacific Stock Exchange in construction-worker drag to watch a hard-hatted Jeff Getty smash a pile of jumbo-sized boxes of Zantac with a steamroller.

Why the fury? The compassionate-use program for 1592 - said to be more powerful and less toxic than AZT and 3TC - is available to a mere 2,400 people worldwide, and Glaxo has nixed expanded access until early 1998. "Glaxo's slow development of 1592 is due to its desire to squeeze the very last profit out of its cash cows AZT and 3TC until patents run out," activist Bill Bahlman said. Many are also miffed by the snail's-pace development of 141W94.

Glaxo responded to POZ's calls with a fax: "Before we rush to treat patients on a wide scale, we have a responsibility to ensure that the drug is safe and efficacious."

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/wellcome-nightmare