

Cancer charity is to “borrow” candidate drugs shelved by companies

In a major initiative to develop new cancer drugs Cancer Research UK will “borrow” candidate drugs that have previously been shelved by drug companies so it can further explore their potential, under a special arrangement announced last week.

The initiative, called Clinical Development Partnerships, will mean that Cancer Research UK and Cancer Research Technology, the charity’s development and commercialisation arm, will be able to use drugs that companies have developed but decided not to develop commercially.

The charity will effectively borrow a drug from a company and conduct early clinical trials at no cost to the company. If the drug looks promising the company retains the option to develop and market the drug, but the charity will get a share of any revenue.

Under the new scheme a scientific advisory board at Cancer Research UK will review drugs that companies have developed preclinically but have decided not to take further.

The scheme will prioritise drugs that act by mechanisms that have been shown to be important in cancer in laboratory and animal models.

These are unlikely to be conventional cytotoxic drugs but more likely to be agents targeting specific receptors or proteins.

Susan Mayor *London*

EU companies can export generic versions of patented drugs to poor countries

The European Union has adopted legislation that will allow companies to produce copies of patented medicines, under licence, for export to developing countries. The measures will



Zuma’s trial leaves confused messages on AIDS

South Africa’s former deputy president, Jacob Zuma, was found not guilty of charges of having raped an HIV positive family friend—but the case has left in its wake further confusion around HIV/AIDS in the country.

HIV/AIDS featured during the rape trial, as Mr Zuma acknowledged he had had sex with the complainant without a condom, despite knowing she was HIV positive and despite being married. He said the sex was consensual—which was accepted by the Johannesburg High Court judge Willem van der Merwe.

When asked in court how he could have had sexual intercourse without a condom and with a woman he knew to be infected with HIV, Mr Zuma, who used to head the official government AIDS body, indicated that he believed that men did not contract the disease particularly easily. He then told the court that he showered after sexual intercourse to “minimise” the possibility of contracting HIV, a claim lampooned in the cartoon above.

His assertions about HIV infection have caused considerable worry among doctors and HIV/AIDS activist groups, who have reported an increased incidence of people querying the need for condoms if they washed after sexual intercourse.

Pat Sidley *Johannesburg*

allow poor nations that lack or have insufficient drug manufacturing capacity, to import safe and effective generic medicines.

The initiative follows the move last December by the Geneva based World Trade Organisation (WTO) to make permanent an earlier provisional waiver to the trade related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPS) agreement.

This amends the existing rules on intellectual property, which state that compulsory licences can only be authorised predominantly for supplies to the domestic market.

But some non-governmental organisations are sceptical about whether the legislation will deliver cheap drugs in practice. The charity, Médecins Sans Fron-

tières, for example, believes that the current measures are too complex and cumbersome.

Rory Watson *Brussels*

Thousands of Ugandans with AIDS don’t get free drugs

The Ugandan government was jubilant when, before the end of last June, the number of people with AIDS receiving antiretroviral treatment reached 60 000, which had been its target for the whole of 2005. But the authorities are worried that since June, the number of people being treated for AIDS has risen by

only about 15 000.

Uganda has secured free antiretroviral drugs for its citizens under a programme funded by the Global Fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria; the World Health Organization; and the US government. The target was to treat 60 000 people in 2005.

Although the target was reached six months ahead of time, many fewer people have come forward for treatment since. The authorities blame several factors, including ignorance of the existence of free drugs and apathy or fear associated with testing for AIDS. Health officials add that people with AIDS are frustrated by the lengthy process they must go through between reporting to hospitals for HIV tests to getting the drugs.

Henry Wasswa *Kampala*

One in four African children has to work

More than 200 million children worldwide are involved in various forms of labour, a report from the International Labour Organization this week showed. One in four children in Africa go out to work, it says.

Around 122.3 million children in Asia are economically active, 49.3 million in sub-Saharan Africa, 5.7 million in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 13.4 million in other regions.

The total number of children involved in all forms of labour, however, is falling. The number fell by 11% between 2000 and 2004, from 246 million to 218 million.

Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest percentage of working children and has made the least progress in curbing the practice. Twenty six per cent of African children are currently working. Some 50 000 are involved in prostitution and pornography, and around 120 000 children are thought to have been coerced into becoming child soldiers or military porters, messengers, cooks, or sex slaves.

Peter Moszynski *London*

The End of Child Labour: Within Reach is available at www.ilo.org.