

**Kaisernetwork.org Daily Update from the XV International AIDS Conference  
July 13, 2004**

Access to AIDS medications continues to elude millions around the world. Delegates and speakers at the XV International AIDS Conference in Bangkok, Thailand called for broader accessibility to antiretroviral treatment. Jim Kim, who heads the World Health Organization project tasked with scaling up treatment, The 3 by 5 Initiative, expressed shame over the six million people who have died of AIDS since the conference last met two years ago. "By these measures of human life, the ones that really matter, we have failed and we have failed miserably to do enough in the precious time that has passed since Barcelona," he said.

Protestors agreed, arguing the availability of cheap generic drugs would remove the biggest barrier to access. But first, advocates say, brand-name pharmaceutical companies must forgo their patents for certain drugs in developing countries. That will dry up innovation, argues Hank McKinnell, CEO of Pfizer. "People living with HIV are going to need a steady stream of new therapies as this virus mutates and currently available treatments fail patients. If 'Access for All' is all that we do in the first sense, access for those needing medicines today, then the theme of future IAS conferences will surely be, 'Why are treatments failing patients?'"

But maintaining research and development should not keep needed medications from people who cannot afford them, according to Walden Bello from the University of the Philippines. "R & D for HIV drugs and other essential medicines is no longer efficient within a corporate context. Big Pharma is more interested in protecting its 20 percent margin, provided by monopolistic pricing based on patents, than in providing drugs to people with little purchasing power."

Neither side denies there's a need to provide these medications, they just disagree on the best way to get them to the millions of people who need them.