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Twenty years of AIDS, and no end in sight

A Martian researcher is sent to earth. His southern hemisphere is to assess a pandemic sweeping the southern hemisphere. On returning to Mars he files his report: “Human beings are undergoing one of the greatest catastrophes in recorded history. The epidemic is far beyond their control and is steadily gaining momentum. Widespread misery, the devastation of communities, and death outpace the inconsequential expenditures of governments in denial. Nothing stands in its way.”

All this began without fanfare. In 1981 the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report published a small case series of five gay men in Los Angeles who had Pneumocystis carinii—a rare form of pneumonia usually found in people with immune dysfunction.1 Since then, the disease has left 23 million dead; it will have killed 55 million by 2010. Africa suffers most of the disease burden. India is next in line.

Why did the Martian’s report fail to mention the HIV epidemic in the developing world? The closing prospects for an effective response by the global health community. We welcome your manuscripts for any section of the journal, but particularly research papers on the opportunities and pitfalls of an HIV vaccine, and understanding and cooperation. We want to stimulate inquiry, attract high quality research, and collect evidence or cost effectiveness). In its defence it does seem to be more safe—and any safe, effective compound for osteoarthritis could do much good, even if the effect size is small. However, given the confusion we cannot recommend its wholesale use. We need large clinical trials, without company interference.

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