Two decades of AIDS, and no end in sight

A Martian researcher is sent to earth. His mission 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 rages 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. Since then, the disease has left 25 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 United Nations Secretary General’s call for a $10bn (£7bn) global health and AIDS fund? United Nations Secretary General’s call for a $10bn fund by 2010. Africa suffers most of the disease burden. If the size of the epidemic it does seem to be very safe—and any safe, effective compound used for osteoarthritic 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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