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tion unknown, and the published trials do not allow any conclusion about its efficacy (let alone its effectiveness or cost effectiveness). In its defence it does seem to be very safe—and any safe, effective compound used 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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Twenty years of AIDS, and no end in sight

A BMJ theme issue will refocus attention on this catastrophic epidemic

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 inconsequen- tial 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 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 opportunities and pitfalls of an HIV vaccine, and the remarkable education material to improve clinical practice among all people infected or affected by HIV.

Among other topics, the issue will include the long term care of AIDS orphans, influencing the social status of women, reducing mother-to-child transmission, the opportunities and pitfalls of an HIV vaccine, and 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 HIV epidemic in the developing world. The closing date for submissions is 1 August 2001; please email your papers to papers@bmj.com.

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