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Düsseldorf, February 24 -- Roche's announcement today that its new fusion inhibitor T-20 will be cost over twice as much as the most expensive drug on the market [Norvir Abbott Labs $9,387.22] in European Countries that elect to undertake a special license sales (SLS) program before regulatory approval is granted has raised great concerns among European's treatment activists setting up a wrenching debate over who will receive it and who will pay for it.

Roche said it will price the drug, called Fuzeon, in Europe at €18,980 ($20,424) for a year's supply fuelling controversy about access to T-20 even in relatively rich countries. "Being the SLS program price announced today indicative of eventual global commercial prices this confirms the fear that a number of us had been feeling for the last few weeks - that the price would be even worse than we had dared imagine" said Mauro Guarinieri - Vice Chair of the European AIDS Treatment Group and chair of the EATG Access Working Group. "Many of us were very hopeful about what this drug can do considering Fuzeon the biggest advance in AIDS treatment since the advent of so-called protease inhibitors in the mid-1990s because of its ability to beat down the hardiest forms of the virus. After having known the price we don't know whether our health systems will have the money to pay for it" he added.

The already-steep cost of AIDS treatment has stirred controversy because of the limits it puts on access to these drugs in Africa and other developing regions. Now, the spiralling price of new medicine threatens to further restrict access to new AIDS treatments even in relatively wealthy countries. EATG has been already involved in though price negotiation with Roche when urging the pharmaceutical company to reduce its price for nelfinavir, a crucial second-line AIDS drug that was priced out of reach of most patients in developing countries.

Roche's announcement today will probably fuel further debate and may eventually lead patients' group to campaign against the Swiss company. " We don't want to face another situation in which patients who have failed to respond to other medications may have to fight again to access new antiretrovirals as it was in the past for protease inhibitors" said Guarinieri, urging for a public debate over fair pricing on essential drugs.

The EATG

The European AIDS Treatment Group (EATG) is a pan-European charitable NGO advocating for the treatment-related interests of people living with HIV and AIDS at the European level. The EATG was founded in 1991 as a co-operative structure of people from 10 different nationalities and communities affected by HIV and AIDS in Europe. Today the EATG has members in 27 European countries. National networks support these efforts. EATG provides information about treatments and trials, gives guidance to public and private organisations and organises community input into trial design. EATG receives funding from a variety of private and public funders to secure its impartiality. Contacts: office@eatg.org

The Access Working Group

The EATG views access to health as a basic human right and access to medicines as a global issue affecting the HIV+ community throughout the world to varying degrees. The Access Working Groups has been established with the aim of improving and enlarging the scope of the EATG in the field of access-to-treatment in Eastern Europe and developing countries. The primary aim of the AWG is to increase the awareness on access' issues, to network with other groups already involved in the field, to establish relationship with local communities trying to work together in building up their capacities, to work on, define and develop strategies to put and maintain pressure on pharmaceutical companies, local government agencies, international bodies and health organizations to make treatments and drugs available wherever there is a need. Contacts: access@eatg.org