AIDS treatment
ATAC
activists coalition
Drug Development Committee

For Immediate Release, December 22, 2003
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ATAC Demands End to Abbott Assault
Price of Old Drug Increased Five Fold

(New York) The AIDS Treatment Activists Coalition (ATAC) today demanded that Abbott immediately roll back a five-fold price increase of ritonavir (Norvir®). The drug is used to boost blood levels of other drugs in anti-HIV treatment combinations, which is the only way many long-time patients can continue to combat HIV. Patients who have used up the few existing treatment options, including “salvage” therapy patients whose virus has become resistant, will be hardest hit by the price increase. Abbott’s action assures that this therapeutic option for salvage patients, and any patient who needs more potent therapy, will cost, and cost dearly.

Abbott raised the average wholesale price of Norvir, from $130 a month to $650 a month for people taking 200 mg daily. Abbott’s repricing of an old drug reflects the company's assertion that the use of Norvir as a booster of other drugs in combination HIV therapy somehow entitles it to be priced closer to newer protease inhibitors, such as atazanavir (Reyataz®) and fosamprenavir (Lexiva®), which have undergone considerable research and development and are generally considered more tolerable than Norvir.

Abbott has not raised the price of its own protease inhibitor, Kaletra, which now becomes the lowest priced drug in the class. Each Kaletra capsule contains a small amount of Norvir. Abbott denies that the sudden price increase of Norvir represents an attempt to protect its market share of Kaletra, although the impact of the Norvir price increase bluntly begs that question. Abbott has modified its patient assistance program so that individuals needing Norvir can more easily get the drug. Third party insurers faced with footing the bill for boosted regimens that are much more expensive than Kaletra, however, will most likely respond by demanding higher patient out-of-pocket expenses.

The HIV Medicine Association (HIVMA), a group of physicians, scientists and other health care professionals advocating for policies that ensure a comprehensive and humane response to the AIDS pandemic asked Abbott to rescind the price increase altogether so the care and health of their patients would not be jeopardized. Dr. Paul Volberding, chairman, and Dr. Daniel Kuritzkes, vice chairman, of the HIVMA Board of Directors sent Abbott a letter on behalf of the organization last week.

“Abbott’s unjust action will adversely affect public and private healthcare resource allocations, HIV research and development as well as the care and well-being of people living with HIV/AIDS”, says ATAC Drug Development Committee Co-Chair Matt Sharp. "This is one of the most blatant and heinous acts of pharmaceutical greed I have seen in my 15 years of AIDS activism. If Abbott doesn't rescind the increase, Norvir profit will be on the backs of PWA's who are in the greatest need of effective treatment. There will be no limit to the rage of people with AIDS if the price is not rolled back."
The AIDS Treatment Activists Coalition (ATAC) is a national coalition of AIDS activists, many living with HIV/AIDS, working together to end the AIDS epidemic by advancing research on HIV/AIDS.

ATAC’s Press Releases and Community Activist Releases are available at www.atac-usa.org