

ACT UP protests Astra

AIDS activists around the country held simultaneous actions June 11 against AIDS profiteering.

Protesters in San Francisco, Boston and Los Angeles let out their anger at Astra Pharmaceuticals, the company that produces Foscarnet, a drug that impedes an opportunistic infection that causes vision loss in more than 20 percent of people with AIDS. They're incensed because Astra charges \$21,500 a year to people with AIDS who need Foscarnet. Foscarnet is the most expensive AIDS drug in history.

"I'm here because somebody has to speak out about AIDS and against the drug empires that are ripping us off and letting people die," Frank Rios, a protester in San Francisco, said.

The activists argue that Foscarnet is one of the simplest and cheapest compounds to produce. They claim that there is no justification for Astra's price, even when taking into account research and development costs. "Every AIDS organization has been talking with them for over a year and they refuse to budge," an activist whose lover died of CMV, the infection treated by Foscarnet, said. "No one can afford this."

"I can tell you that people with insurance are hesitant to use the drug because it will cap out their insurance quickly, and then they won't be able to get other treatments," G'dali Braverman, an ACT UP member said.

Amid chants, a die-in and showers of blood-stained money, Dr. Andrew Zysman, ACT UP Golden Gate's spokesperson at the protest, said that before Astra realized its drug could be marketed to AIDS patients, the price of Foscarnet was considerably lower than it is today. Zysman said he did not know what that earlier price was. "I don't know what the price was before, but I am certain they did not charge \$21,500," Zysman said.

"This disease strikes people as they're dying. The drug doesn't save lives, it just gives people a little dignity as they're dying," he said.

Rachel Timoner

There is only us

Democratic presidential nominee Bill Clinton departed from the text of his acceptance speech July 16 and made reference to gays.

"It is time to heal America," Clinton said.

"And so we must say to every American: Look beyond the stereotypes that blind us. We need each other. All of us, we need each other. We don't have a person to waste. And yet for too long, politicians told the most of us that are doing all right that what's really wrong with America is the rest of us: them. Them, the minorities. Them, the liberals. Them, the poor. Them, the homeless. Them, the people with disabilities. Them, the gays. We got to where we really them'ed ourselves to death. Them and them and them. But this is America. There is no them; there is only us."

In other convention news, 10,000 AIDS activists marched from Columbus Circle to Times Square July 14, demanding the Bush administration step up its fight against the disease.

Representing a 300-group coalition called United for AIDS Action, the protesters demanded more attention from the White House, nationalized health care, improved research and education efforts and an end to discrimination against HIV-positive people and people with AIDS.

Clinton previously had endorsed all the demands except that for socialized medicine. Instead, he "will deliver affordable health care to every American through a national health-care plan that...expands choices and guarantees coverage."

Actress Jessica Lange, the Rev. Jesse Jackson and New York Mayor David Dinkins addressed the Times Square rally.

Meanwhile, a gay man with AIDS addressed the Democratic delegates and prime-time TV viewers July 14. Bob Hattoy, an environmental adviser to the Clinton campaign, said the Bush administration's AIDS efforts are inadequate and discriminatory.

"AIDS doesn't discriminate, but the George Bush White House does," he said. "We need a president who will take on the drug companies that drive AIDS patients into poverty. We need a president who isn't afraid of the word 'condom'."

Hattoy urged delegates to "vote as if our lives depended on it. Mine does, yours could, and we all have so much to live for," he said.

In his acceptance speech, Clinton promised, "...an America in which health care is a right, not a privilege; in which we tell all our people, 'Your government will have the courage, finally, to take on the health-care profiteers and make health care affordable for every family'."

Rex Wockner

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Oct. 2 through 12 to demand an end to 500 years of injustice to Native Americans and an end to nuclear testing on native lands. Events will include an Indigenous People's Forum, including testimony, presentation and workshops; a demonstration at the Nevada Test Site Operations Office in Las Vegas; completion of the final leg of two 3,000-mile Walks across America; an encampment adjacent to the testing site; a Native-led healing ceremony; a multicultural rally; and mass non-violent direct action. For more information, contact PO Box 26725, Las Vegas, NV 89126-00725, or phone (702) 386-9834.

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