

AIDS drug offered free to the Third World

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The Bristol-Myers Squibb Co. has agreed to license its AIDS drug Reyataz free of charge to two Third World generic drug manufacturers.

The move is believed one of the first such agreements involving a second-line AIDS treatment, The Wall Street Journal reported.

The New York-based company announced the agreement Wednesday involving South Africa's Aspen PharmaCare Holdings Ltd. and India's Emcure Pharmaceuticals Ltd. The pharmaceutical companies will be able to manufacture a generic form of Reyataz and sell it in sub-Saharan Africa.

The World Health Organization says more than 1 million people in the Third World are receiving first-line AIDS medicines, but patients usually develop resistance to the drugs within a year and need second-line treatments to fight the virus.

Second-line regimens are up to 30 times as expensive as first-line medications, the relief organization Doctors Without Borders told The Journal.

Reyataz has been found to be especially effective when used in conjunction with another drug made by Abbott Laboratories Inc.

Bristol-Myers began marketing Reyataz in the United States in 2003. The company's patent expires in 2017.

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