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## **More Low Cost Anti-AIDS Drugs Mean More People Treated**

This is the VOA Special English Health Report.

An American program called the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief helps millions of people infected with HIV, the virus responsible for AIDS. PEPFAR is considered one of the most successful programs created during the presidency of George W. Bush. Its goal was to change HIV/AIDS from a death sentence to a disease that, while serious, could be treated. And for millions of people around the world, that is just what happened.

But researchers say it was not until PEPFAR started using generic drugs that major progress was made in fighting HIV/AIDS. Generic drugs are copies of medicines developed by large drug companies. But they often cost a lot less.

Researchers from Brown University in Rhode Island studied the effectiveness of PEPFAR. Kartik Venkatesh was the lead author of a report on the study. He says the high cost of patented antiretroviral drugs had an immediate influence on the program after it began.

American officials considered whether to provide patented drugs to HIV-infected patients, both in the United States and overseas. Dr. Venkatesh says some people believe that the drug industry wanted the government-financed program to use patented drugs.

But generic drugs were shown to be effective in treating HIV as far back as two thousand three. Using generic drugs helped cut the cost of treating a person from about one thousand one hundred dollars a year to about three hundred dollars a year in two thousand five.

PEPFAR has also been able to save millions of dollars by reducing transportation costs -- for example, using ships instead of airplanes to move the drugs. Dr. Venkatesh says the PEPFAR model could be used in the fight against other diseases as developing countries begin seeing health problems that until recently had only been seen in richer countries.

DR. KARTIK VENKATESH: "There is a movement towards understanding that the real and perhaps potentially larger burden in the future is also going to be chronic diseases like cardiovascular disease, diabetes (and) cancer. And those are also diseases that require chronic, long-term medication. A lot can be learned from the experience about accessing generics for the treatment of HIV." (:23)

The Brown University researchers have proposed creation of a plan for what they call the "efficient and transparent" purchase of generic drugs. Planners would include the United States, the World Health Organization and the makers of generic drugs.

And that's the VOA Special English Health Report. I'm Christopher Cruise.

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