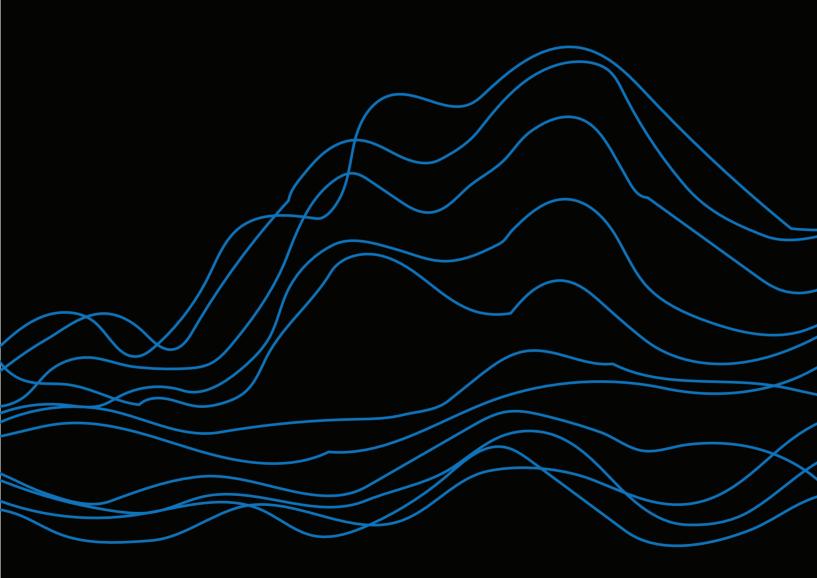
Pipeline Report » 2023

Antiretroviral Therapy





The Antiretroviral Therapy Pipeline 2023

By Richard Jefferys

At the end of last year, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved lenacapavir (trade name Sunlenca), the first antiretroviral that works by inhibiting HIV's capsid protein, and the first to be dosed just once every six months (see table 1). The decision followed approvals by the European Union, United Kingdom, and Canada earlier in 2022.

The HIV capsid protein encapsulates the virus's genetic material and plays a role in multiple steps of the viral life cycle. <u>Research has demonstrated</u> that the activity of lenacapavir is unaffected by HIV resistance mutations against currently available classes of antiretrovirals. The drug is manufactured by Gilead Sciences, and the FDA indication is for "heavily treatment-experienced adults with multidrug resistant HIV-1 infection failing their current antiretroviral regimen due to resistance, intolerance, or safety considerations."

The data supporting approval derive from the CAPELLA trial, which enrolled 72 heavily treatment-experienced people with HIV whose current antiretroviral therapy (ART) was failing to suppress viral load to below 400 copies/mL. Results after 26 weeks of follow-up were published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* on May 12, 2022, with additional information on outcomes after 52 weeks presented as a poster at the 2023 Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI).

Participants in CAPELLA had previously taken an average of nine antiretrovirals, and about half showed evidence of HIV resistance to all four main classes of ART (nucleoside reverse-transcriptase inhibitors, non-nucleoside reverse-transcriptase inhibitors, protease inhibitors, and integrase inhibitors).

An initial cohort of 36 participants whose detectable viral load had remained stable between a screening visit and study entry received a two-week period of oral lenacapavir or placebo. This study design allowed for a randomized comparison of short-term effects on HIV viral load, with 88% of lenacapavir recipients experiencing at least a 0.5 log₁₀ (two-thirds) decline compared with 17% of placebo recipients. These participants were then switched to open-label lenacapavir administered by abdominal subcutaneous injection every six months, in combination with an optimized background ART regimen. An additional second cohort of 36 participants received open-label lenacapavir plus an optimized background ART regimen, with an oral lead-in for two weeks followed by subcutaneous injection every six months.

After 26 weeks of follow-up, HIV viral load was below the limit of detection in 81% of the participants in the first cohort and 89% of the participants in the second. The poster presentation at CROI 2023 reported that 78% of all participants (56 out of 72) maintained undetectable viral load after 52 weeks. The average CD4+ T-cell increase at this timepoint was 84 cells per microliter. These represent impressive results in a population with multidrug-resistant HIV.

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Lenacapavir is also being investigated as a potential first-line therapy in the CALIBRATE trial. The results after 54 weeks of follow-up were <u>published in *The Lancet HIV*</u> in January 2023. A total of 182 participants were divided into four groups:

- 1. Injectable lenacapavir every 26 weeks after two weeks of oral leadin dosing, combined with daily emtricitabine and tenofovir alafenamide for 28 weeks and then combined with daily tenofovir alafenamide.
- 2. Injectable lenacapavir every 26 weeks after two weeks of oral lead-in dosing, combined with daily emtricitabine and tenofovir alafenamide for 28 weeks and then combined with daily bictegravir.
- 3. Oral daily lenacapavir (600 mg for the first two days, followed by 50 mg daily) with daily emtricitabine and tenofovir alafenamide.
- 4. A control group given oral daily bictegravir, emtricitabine, and tenofovir alafenamide.

The journal article reports that most participants (93%) were male, three (2%) were transgender, a slight majority (52%) Black, and 45% of Latinx ethnicity. After 54 weeks, viral load was suppressed to undetectable levels in 90% of group one, 85% of group two, 85% of group three, and 92% of the controls. Results after 80 weeks of follow-up were presented in a poster at CROI 2023, demonstrating continued high rates of viral load suppression. The researchers conclude that "these results support ongoing evaluation and further development of LEN [lenacapavir] in combination with other long-acting partner agents."

In <u>a commentary</u> accompanying the paper in Lancet HIV, Chloe Orkin notes that the identity of an appropriate long-acting partner for lenacapavir is as yet unclear. Gilead is evaluating whether two long-acting broadly neutralizing antibodies (bNAbs) that the company licensed from Rockefeller University, teropavimab and zinlirvimab (formerly known as 3BNC117-LS and 10-1074-LS), might be candidates.

Preliminary results from a small ongoing phase Ib trial of the combination were described by Joe Eron in <u>a presentation at CROI 2023</u>. All components were dosed every six months, with the bNAbs delivered by intravenous infusion. Most participants (18 out of 20) successfully suppressed viral load to undetectable levels after 26 weeks. One participant displayed detectable viral load after 16 weeks, possibly indicating the development of resistance to one or more elements of the regimen, but achieved suppression after being switched back to their previous ART. The researchers attempted to assess whether the rebounding HIV showed evidence of resistance mutations, but because viral load levels were low, the assay failed to generate evaluable results (a known problem with HIV resistance assays). A second participant chose to leave the study at week 12 and return to oral ART, with their viral load below the limit of detection at the time of withdrawal. The major issue associated with use of bNAbs is the presence of preexisting resistance among circulating HIV variants because the antibodies target the most variable part of the virus, the outer envelope protein. Eron's study screened potential participants for HIV resistance to teropavimab and zinlirvimab prior to enrollment, and half of those evaluated (54 of 109) showed evidence of reduced susceptibility to one or both bNAbs. While baseline resistance may present a hurdle for widespread clinical use of this type of combination, Gilead is nevertheless launching a larger phase II trial of lenacapavir, teropavimab, and zinlirvimab dosed every six months.

In addition to the long-acting injectable form of lenacapavir, Gilead has an <u>ongoing</u> <u>trial</u> evaluating the potential of oral lenacapavir combined with the integrase inhibitor bictegravir to offer a simplified switch option for people on more complicated ART regimens. The phase II portion of the study will compare daily bictegravir plus oral lenacapavir at two different doses (25 mg or 50 mg) with standard ART. After 24 weeks, the trial will shift to a phase III evaluation of a fixed dose combination of bictegravir plus oral lenacapavir compared with standard ART. The amount of oral lenacapavir included in the fixed-dose pill will be based on the results from the initial phase II dose comparison.

The most common side effects from lenacapavir in studies conducted to date were injection-site reactions, nausea, and headache. No severe adverse events have been associated with the drug. There have been at least four reported instances of lenacapavir discontinuation because of injection-site reactions, which are typically transient but rarely can persist as nodules or induration (thickening of the skin).

The development of HIV resistance to lenacapavir is possible but has been uncommon; in the CAPELLA study, the emergence of resistance mutations in eight participants was associated with a lack of other active antiretrovirals in their background combination. The <u>FDA label</u> warns that the drug can remain in the body at a low level for long periods, which could increase the risk of the development of resistance if doses are missed or the drug is stopped without another suppressive ART regimen being initiated.

Islatravir is an experimental nucleoside reverse transcriptase translocation inhibitor (NRTTI) developed by Merck that was until recently considered a promising long-acting oral antiretroviral, and an ideal candidate partner for lenacapavir. The two manufacturers entered into <u>a co-development agreement</u> for the combination in early 2021. These plans experienced a setback when it was <u>disclosed in November 2021</u> that islatravir administration had been associated with unexpected declines in CD4+ T-cell and white blood counts. The news was followed rapidly by the FDA <u>placing full or partial clinical</u> holds on ongoing islatravir trials for both treatment and preexposure prophylaxis (PrEP).

On September 20, 2022, Merck announced a paring down of the islatravir development program. The company is now pursuing combination approaches that are considered likely to be safe based on their analyses and feedback from the FDA. This involves a phase III program combining a lower once-daily 0.25 mg dose of islatravir with the NNRTI doravirine and an amended protocol with a lower once-weekly 2 mg dose of islatravir for a phase II trial in combination with oral lenacapavir.

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The islatravir once-monthly oral PrEP program has been discontinued, and the FDA partial clinical hold on studies of higher doses remains in place (current participants can continue to receive study drug, but there is no further screening and enrollment). At CROI 2023, Merck researchers presented evidence that the <u>once-daily 0.25 mg dose</u> and <u>once-weekly</u> 2 mg dose are likely to be safe because the negative effect of islatravir on white blood cell counts is dose related.

There are several new additions to the pipeline from established manufacturers (table 2). Gilead Sciences is initiating a research protocol that will assess two new candidates: GS-5894, a long-acting NNRTI, and GS-1720, a long-acting integrase inhibitor. The study is recruiting HIV-positive participants at multiple sites in the United States.

ViiV Healthcare has launched the first phase I studies of VH4524184, an integrase inhibitor, and VH4011499, a capsid inhibitor. Both are recruiting HIV-negative participants for an initial evaluation of safety, tolerability, and pharmacokinetics (the behavior of the drug in the body).

Also added from ViiV is VH3810109 (also known as GSK3810109A, and formerly called N6-LS), a long-acting bNAb licensed from the National Institutes of Health that may have the potential to partner with other long-acting antiretrovirals. Encouraging results from an ongoing phase II trial were presented at recent HIV research conferences (see entry in table 2), but the issue of resistance to bNAbs is also relevant to this candidate, with the magnitude of the viral load response among participants associated with HIV's susceptibility to the bNAb at baseline.

ViiV Healthcare's plans for moving the maturation inhibitor GSK3640254 into a phase III efficacy evaluation <u>have been shelved</u>. The decision isn't related to safety and efficacy but rather based on the company's focus on developing antiretrovirals that offer significant additional value compared with existing options, particularly longer-acting regimens. The abundance of daily oral regimens essentially makes for a crowded market, and it appears the potential financial payoff from progressing GSK3640254 to approval was not considered sufficient to justify the cost of further development.

HIV advocates have serious concerns about this trend toward abandonment of daily regimens because there remains a need for additional novel options for people who develop resistance to extant antiretrovirals, and more choices are always better than fewer.

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TABLE 1. U.S. ADULT APPROVALS SINCE JULY 2022

Product	Class/Type	Company	FDA Approval Date	U.S. Launch Price (Annual WAC)
Lenacapavir (Sunlenca)	Capsid inhibitor	Gilead	December 22, 2022	\$42,250 for the first year, then \$39,000
failing their curre	,		with multidrug resistant HIV- olerance, or safety considerat	
			the Use of Antiretroviral Ager e use of lenacapavir in the set	
experienced peop in the New Englan	ble with HIV and multidru <u>d Journal of Medicine</u> on N	g resistance. Results May 12, 2022. Result	valuating lenacapavir in heavily after 26 weeks of follow-up v is after 52 weeks were <u>reporte</u> <i>ctious Diseases</i> , September 9, 2	vere published ed at CROI
· · ·	trial (CALIBRATE) of lena at 54 weeks were publish	•	on with approved ARVs in AR ⁻ (in January 2023.	F-naive people
0 0	and III trial investigating of people on more complex	, ,	r in combination with bictegra	vir as a
	combination with islatrav higher than 2 mg).	ir, <u>in partnership</u> wit	h Merck (protocol amended to	o remove
teropavimab and		al launched in March	o LA broadly neutralizing antil 2021 with preliminary results recruit 125 participants.	
administration of 2.2log ₁₀ copies/m Journal of Antimic	single doses ranging from L over 10 days, without s	n 20 to 750 mg led to serious adverse even nuary 2022 found th	in Nature in July 2020. Subcu o decreases in HIV viral load o its. Resistance analyses <u>publis</u> at mutations occurred in only elected for efficacy trials.	f up to hed in the

TABLE 2: ARV PRODUCTS IN DEVELOPMENT

Product	Class/Type	Company	Development Phase
Islatravir	NRTTI	Merck	Phase III

- A new category of ARV: NRTTI.
- All islatravir trials were placed on <u>full or partial clinical holds</u> in December 2021 due to declines in total lymphocyte and CD4+ T-cell counts observed among both HIV-positive and HIV-negative recipients. After further investigation and consultation with the FDA, a <u>more limited development program</u> investigating low once-daily or once-weekly dosing is being pursued. Treatment trials of higher doses remain on partial clinical hold (no new screening or enrollment), and the PrEP development program for HIV-negative people has been discontinued.
- Trials now include:
 - A <u>phase III trial</u> of a once-daily fixed-dose formulation with doravirine and 0.25 mg of islatravir for people who received the combination in earlier studies.
 - A phase III trial for treatment-naive people comparing a once-daily fixed-dose formulation with doravirine and 0.25 mg of islatravir with Biktarvy (bictegravir/emtricitabine/tenofovir alafenamide).
 - Two phase III switch studies: one for people on any standard ART regimen, and one for people receiving Biktarvy.
 - A phase II trial of once-weekly dosing of 2 mg islatravir with lenacapavir in partnership with Gilead. This protocol has been revised to reduce the weekly dose of islatravir from the originally planned 20 mg a week. Exclusion criteria have also been modified to prevent enrollment of individuals with evidence of drug resistance mutations in HIV's reverse transcriptase. The latter change was prompted by concerns that the lower islatravir dose may be insufficiently active against HIV containing these mutations.
 - Open-label <u>follow-up study</u> for certain participants in trials of the 0.75 mg once-daily fixed-dose formulation with doravirine.
 - Several previous trials involving higher doses are ongoing but under partial clinical holds, including phase III trials of the 0.75 mg once-daily fixed-dose formulation with doravirine in <u>treatment-naive</u>, virologically suppressed (two trials, <u>switch A and switch B</u>) and <u>heavily treatment-experienced</u> people with HIV and a <u>phase IIb trial</u> of once-weekly dosing in combination with the NNRTI MK-8507.
- Presentations at CROI 2023 described the analyses supporting the decision to evaluate <u>0.25 mg daily</u> and <u>2 mg weekly</u> dosing on the basis that they are unlikely to have negative effects on white blood cell counts.
- Phase IIb trial results were published in Lancet HIV on May 14, 2021. A brief report describing results after 96 weeks of follow-up was published in JAIDS in September 2022.
- Phase Ib safety, PK, and antiretroviral activity results were published in The Lancet HIV on January 3, 2020.
- Results from drug interaction studies with doravirine and dolutegravir and tenofovir disoproxil fumarate have been
 published, reporting no significant interactions.

Albuvirtide (Aikening)	Fusion inhibitor	Frontier	Phase II/III
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- Approved in China in June 2018 based on <u>48-week data</u> from the phase III TALENT study, which demonstrated superiority of albuvirtide plus ritonavir-boosted lopinavir over lopinavir/ritonavir plus two NRTIs as second-line therapy.
- A trial in the United States is evaluating albuvirtide in combination with the broadly neutralizing antibody 3BNC117 as LA maintenance therapy for people with suppressed viral load.
- The combination of albuvirtide and 3BNC117 was being investigated in people with multidrug-resistant HIV in a phase II trial launched in September 2020. The study was slated to end in December 2022, but the registry record hasn't been updated since September 2021, rendering the current status unclear.
- The effects of albuvirtide and 3BNC117 on the HIV reservoir and viral load rebound after an ART interruption were due to be assessed in a <u>phase II trial</u>, however the registry record has also been neglected and the study was never listed as open for enrollment. Inquiries to company representatives about the status of these studies have not been answered.

Product	Class/Type	Company	Development Phase
PRO 140 (leronlimab)	CCR5 antagonist	CytoDyn	Phase II/III

- Leronlimab is a monoclonal antibody designed to block the interaction between HIV and CCR5, the primary coreceptor the virus uses to enter and infect cells.
- In October 2022, CytoDyn voluntarily withdrew its Biologics License Application (BLA) to the FDA for the treatment of multidrug-resistant HIV because of problems with the data. The fate of the drug in the context of HIV appears very uncertain, with the company now reported to be focusing on non-alcoholic steatohepatitis.
- Former CytoDyn CEO Nader Pourhassan was indicted in December 2022 for securities fraud schemes related to leronlimab, along with an associate, Kazem Kazempour, who ran the company that managed CytoDyn's clinical trials.
- The FDA <u>placed holds</u> on both HIV and COVID-19 programs for leronlimab in March 2022. Participants receiving leronlimab through trial extensions were transitioned to alternative therapeutics.
- The FDA previously <u>rejected a BLA</u> from the manufacturer in July 2020, citing lack of information necessary for a review. The recent indictment alleges that CytoDyn was aware that the submission was inadequate but went ahead in an effort to mislead investors in the company.
- Preliminary results from the dose-escalating <u>CD03 phase II/III evaluation</u> of weekly subcutaneous PRO 140 as single-agent monotherapy in virologically suppressed people were presented as a poster at <u>CROI 2019</u>. Rates of virological failure were high in the 350 mg and 525 mg dose groups (65.9% and 33%, respectively), but suppression was better maintained in the ongoing 700 mg dose group (6 out of 43 participants experienced virological failure, defined as two consecutive viral loads ≥200 copies/mL).
- Primary efficacy results from the CD02 phase IIb/III trial of PRO 140 in treatment-experienced people were reported at ASM Microbe 2018.
- The CD01 phase lib trial and extension study, demonstrating moderate efficacy of PRO 140 single-agent maintenance therapy, were <u>published online</u> in April 2018. In a paper <u>published in *PloS Pathogens*</u> on March 31, 2022, researchers report that five participants in the extension study were able to maintain HIV viral load suppression for over seven years while receiving the 700 mg dose.
- Dr. Jonah Sacha at Oregon Health & Science University is planning to conduct a leronlimab study in a person with HIV who requires a stem cell transplant to treat a concurrent condition. Several people with HIV, most famously Timothy Ray Brown, have been cured of the infection after receipt of stem cell transplants from donors with the CCR5Δ32 mutation (which causes immune cells to be resistant to most HIV variants), but in this case such a donor couldn't be identified. The goal of the study is to assess whether blocking CCR5 with leronlimab can protect the newly transplanted immune system cells from HIV infection and possibly achieve a cure in the absence of the CCR5Δ32 mutation.

Semzuvolimab (UB-421)	CD4 attachment inhibitor	United BioPharma	Phase II/III
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- Results from a small phase II trial evaluating weekly or biweekly UB-421 as a single-agent maintenance therapy during an 8- or 16-week ART interruption were published in the New England Journal of Medicine in April 2019. No cases of virological failure (defined as >400 copies/mL) were documented.
- In August 2022, the company announced that the FDA had approved an NIAID-sponsored, 25-person phase II trial of UB-421 in combination with optimized background ART regimen in people with multidrug-resistant HIV.
- A <u>phase III trial</u> in combination with an optimized background ART regimen in treatment-experienced participants is planned but not yet enrolling.
- A phase II trial exploring the effects of UB-421 on the HIV reservoir and another HIV cure-related proof-of-concept phase II trial testing UB-421 in combination with the latency-reversing agent chidamide (an histone deacetylase inhibitor) have been completed, with results yet to be presented.
- A phase I trial assessing delivery via subcutaneous injection has also been completed, with results pending.

414 0507	Class/Type	Company	Development Phase
MK-8507	NNRTI	Merck	Phase IIb
 Initially evaluated in a 	phase I trial in 2014/2015.		
	oviral activity, and resistance prof nune Deficiency Syndromes and An		
published in the Journ	n increase in exposure to fluoride <i>al of Clinical Pharmacology</i> on Aug s are not expected to exceed a cli	ust 21, 2021. The authors state	that at doses used
	ing a once-weekly combination w FDA (see islatravir entry above).	vith islatravir; currently among th	he Merck trials placed
 A planned phase I stud not yet opened for en 	dy of MK-8507 in HIV-negative parollment.	articipants with mild or moderat	te hepatic impairment has
Cabotegravir (LA), /RC07-523LS	INSTI, bNAb	ViiV/Vaccine Research Center	Phase II
developed by the Vaco		IIH. Participants will switch from	ne LA bNAb VRC07-523LS n standard ART and undergo a 46- reinstituting their oral ART regimen.
report that HIV sample	% showed evidence of resistance	e potential participants met pres	ed at CROI 2023. The authors specified criteria for susceptibility s could not be evaluated because
VH3810109 (also known as GSK3810109A, N6-LS	hNΔh	ViiV	Phase II
bNAb licensed from the second seco	ne NIH by ViiV Healthcare.		
 Results from an ongoin an average viral load re 	ng phase II trial presented at <u>HIV</u> eduction of 1.72 log ₁₀ after a sing NAb (retrospectively assessed fro	le infusion. Virologic response v	
	om a completed <u>phase I trial</u> inves HuPH20), which allows for large	0 0	
GSK3739937	Maturation inhibitor	ViiV/GlaxoSmithKline	Phase I
	ng HIV maturation inhibitor. A pha shed in <i>Pharmacology Research an</i> ekly dosing		
MK-8527	NRTTI	Merck	Phase I
 Merck disclosed that t 	hat MK-8527 is an NRTTI in a Se	ptember 2022 press release.	
A single-dose phase I f	trial is recruiting in South Africa.		
	ng safety, tolerability, PK, and ant	tiretroviral activity in people wit	h HIV in Romania has
 A phase I trial evaluati been completed. 	to ClinicalTrials.gov and indicate	viral load declines of around 1 l	og ₁₀ , with no serious

	Class/Type	Company	Development Phase
CPT31	Novel D-peptide HIV entry inhibitor	Navigen, Inc.	Phase I
 Entry inhibitor that has <u>s</u> 	shown activity in the macaque mo	del of SHIV infection.	
A phase la trial in HIV-ne	egative participants has been com	ppleted; the results are <u>posted to C</u>	ClinicalTrials.gov.
0		nent but is looking to license or se onal communication April 26, 202	
Lipovirtide	Fusion inhibitor	Shanxi Kangbao Biological Product Co., Ltd.	Phase I
 A phase I trial evaluating 	a single injection of lipovirtide in	treatment-naive people with HIV	is recruiting in China.
A 24-person phase I trial	l of multiple dosing is planned but	t not yet recruiting.	
VH4004280	Capsid inhibitor	ViiV	Phase I
 First-in-human phase I tr HIV capsid inhibitor deliv 	,	unteers evaluating the safety, tole	rability, and PK of a new
STP0404	Integrase inhibitor	ST Pharm Co., Ltd.	Phase I
 HIV-1 integrase inhibitor 	r targeting the LEDGF/p75-integr	ase interaction site.	
and plans for a phase Ila	, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,	esented at AIDS 2022, reporting f United States. A <u>company press re</u> gistered and recruiting.	
and plans for a phase lla would start in the fourth	clinical trial to be initiated in the	United States. A <u>company press re</u> gistered and recruiting.	
and plans for a phase lla would start in the fourth	clinical trial to be initiated in the quarter of 2022, and it is <u>now re</u>	United States. A <u>company press re</u> gistered and recruiting.	
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TABLE ABBREVIATIONS

ART: antiretroviral therapy
ARV: antiretroviral
ASM: American Society for Microbiology
bNAb: broadly neutralizing antibody
CROI: Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections
FDA: U.S. Food and Drug Administration
INSTI: integrase strand transfer inhibitor
LA: long-acting
NIAID: U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
NIH: National Institutes of Health
NRTI: nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitor
NNRTI: non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitor
NRTTI: nucleoside reverse transcriptase translocation inhibitor
PK: pharmacokinetic(s)
WAC: wholesale acquisition cost

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