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What is GCM doing?

Advocacy in Action

California Symposium Explores Progress on Multi-Purpose Prevention Technologies

North America

On March 24-25, the California Microbicides Initiative, in collaboration with Alliance for Microbicide Development, PATH, CONRAD and several other partners convened the first international symposium on "Advancing Prevention Technologies for Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy" in Berkeley, California. Unlike other meetings focused specifically on either contraception or the prevention of HIV and other STIs, this event reviewed the status of multi-purpose sexual and reproductive health (SRH) prevention technologies ie, those designed to meet more than one need at a time.

An excellent array of presenters updated approximately 100 participants on current and future strategies for developing multi-purpose devices, vaccines and microbicides, as well as the challenges of integrating them into existing service delivery. One highlight on the microicides front was a presentation by Dr. Jim Turpin (US National Institutes of Health) entitled, "Versatile platforms for manufacturing and delivery of multi-purpose microbicides." After explaining that his work focuses on conceptualizing and exploring future possibilities, Dr. Turpin presented some exciting leads including mucous penetrating nanoparticles; bioresponsive gels (designed to release a microbicide under specific biological conditions); and live delivery systems such as genetically engineered lactobacilli. One possibility in the latter category is a type of lactobacilli formulated in yoghurt that, when consumed and digested by monkeys, has provided some evidence of possible disease protection in the rectum.

The advocacy sector was well represented by Angelina Namiba, a Programme Leader at the African HIV Policy Network in the UK and an active member of both the International Community

of Women Living with HIV/AIDS and the UK Campaign for Microbicides. Angelina spoke on the closing Strategies Panel and co-facilitated the subsequent Advocacy Strategies Working Group with Liza Solomon of the Alliance for Microbicide Development.

GCM endorser Angelina Namiba from the African HIV Policy Network with Dr Olanrewaju Onigbogi from the University College Hospital Ibadan, Nigeria at the conference

Young health care professionals in Kenya learn to advocate for woman-initiated HIV prevention

Africa

Walter is a final year student at the University of Nairobi's School of Nursing and a member of the Nursing Students Association (NUNSA). Interested in gaining a better understanding of health issues currently affecting Kenyan society, Walter and his contemporaries participated in a half-day sensitisation workshop. The workshop was co-hosted by GCM and the Health Rights Advocacy Forum (HERAF), with the aim of increasing students' awareness of the right to health and its relationship with woman-initiated HIV prevention.

Lisena DeSantis (HERAF) introduced the students to the principle of health as a human right, outlining the link between HIV/AIDS and human rights. Pauline Irungu (GCM) then introduced the students to various woman-initiated prevention options including female condoms, microbicides and pre-exposure prophylaxis. She updated them on the status of current HIV prevention research and on issues of access to current available tools.

At the end of the workshop, the facilitators helped the students identify the role they could take on as nursing professionals in advocating for woman-initiated prevention options from a rights-based approach.



Thanks to goes to HERAF and NUNSA for this successful workshop.

Picture: Walter Oginga, NUNSA Chairperson outlines the workshop objectives to his colleagues.

The fourth South African AIDS Conference

Africa

Last week, South Africa hosted the fourth AIDS conference with the theme "Scaling up for success". This conference celebrated the long-awaited end of AIDS denialism and the beginning of a new chapter in South Africa's commitment to fight HIV/AIDS.

HIV prevention was the centre of many debates highlighted by the fact that the incidence rate in Southern Africa remains high. Research and communication groups presented data on the role of sexual networks and "multiple concurrent partners" as primary drivers of the epidemic in Southern Africa. However, few solutions were offered to tackle this economically and culturally sensitive issue.

Health Minister Barbara Hogan and others reaffirmed the need for new prevention methods. A

number of events, including a symposium “When Treatment Meets Prevention: The Potential of ARV-based Prevention”, skills-building sessions on “Community Involvement in clinical trials” and the MMCI-hosted “Trial and Error: HIV Prevention Clinical Trials and the Media” saw GCM staff engage in lively discussions. Acknowledging the anticipated challenges of implementing new prevention methods whilst continuing the push for more HIV prevention research was emphasized.

What is GCM doing ?

On March 5, GCM sent out a notice to our constituents inviting applications to participate in a Microbicides Research Literacy Training that would feature our Microbicides Essentials course (available on-line at <http://www.hivpreventionresearch.org/>)

The mailing explained that the in-person training was for clinical trial staff and advocates based from, and working in Africa and would be held in Nairobi, Kenya on 18-19 June. It proposes to give participants the tools and practice they need to speak more knowledgeably about and better answer questions regarding the complexities of microbicides development and testing.

Those applying were required to

- Be conversant in English.
- Willing and able to complete a minimum of 3 modules of the Microbicides Essentials course (approximately 6 hours of work) by 1 June.
- Complete a seven-page application form including three brief essays on what they hoped to gain from the training, their involvement and length of time in the microbicides and/or HIV prevention research field, and how attending the training would benefit them professionally as well as the community they served.
- Complete and submit the whole application in 3 weeks

We had hoped to receive enough strong responses to fill the 20 training slots available. In fact, we got an amazing 202 applications from 16 countries across the continent of Africa! Staring at the huge stack of applications, GCM's Gary Wolnitzek exclaimed, “This is what capacity-building looks like. Now no one can tell us there's not a demand for it!” This influx was certainly proof of both the under-estimated need and demand for GCM's capacity building services and the fact that demand is not restricted to any one country or region but, rather, broad-based.

Although the June training will have only 20 participants (to assure high-quality interactive instruction), we have decided to accommodate as many of the qualified applicants as possible by exploring additional ways to address the demand generated by the announcement with 1) two additional trainings in Zambia 2) a training in South Africa, if funding can be secured and 3) other trainings with other African NGO co-hosts, again subject to funding being secured.

We are also scheduling distance learning “study groups”, in which people will complete the modules independently but convene regularly in a “virtual classroom” via internet and conference call for questions and discussion of the material with GCM staff, researchers and other experts. The first of these will be convened with European and African participants this summer and North American participants later in the year.

To find out more about the Microbicides Essential course online, in-person or study group trainings please contact info@global-campaign.org