



GC News #124: March 2011

GC News is a forum for exchange on new HIV prevention options, especially for women.

Conferences, Meetings, Trainings

2011 18th Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI)
Women's Research Initiative (WRI) Annual Meeting
Microbicides Trial Network (MTN) Annual Meeting
HIV Capacity Building Partners Summit

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Welcome to two new Program officers Elizabeth Chiyende and Patrick Mwai Muchai

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Conferences, Meetings, Trainings

19th Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI), USA, February

Key to GCM's advocacy is the scientific and research literacy of its own staff. With the need to engage science and clinical experts and share knowledge with its own team and the wider advocate community, the ability to stay abreast of developments remains essential. As the premier conference in HIV science, CROI provides valuable opportunities for learning and connecting. Yasmin Halima and Samu Dube attended CROI and the many subsidiary meetings organized around the conference schedule including the AVAC/Fenway Community and Research Forum. Yasmin interviewed Dr. Craig Hendrix, Johns Hopkins, to discuss the first head to head pharmacokinetic study of oral versus topical tenofovir gel and Dr. Peter Anton, University of California – Los Angeles (UCLA), on findings from the use of vaginal tenofovir gel when applied rectally. Yasmin also conducted a panel discussion on highlights from the conference relating to women and HIV prevention with Dr. Carl Dieffenbach, US National Institutes of Health (NIH), Dr. Diana Dickinson, physician from Botswana, and Dr. Samu Dube from GCM. A video podcast will be made available on the GCM website.



Women's Research Initiative (WRI), USA, March: Yasmin attended the WRI annual meeting in Adairsville, Georgia where she presented on the challenges of introducing a new HIV prevention technology for women in Africa and the US. For a summary of the 2011 annual meeting, full meeting reports and a list of participants, [click here](#).

Microbicide Trial Network (MTN), USA, March

Yasmin attended the MTN annual meeting in Arlington, Virginia. Highlights from the programme include an update on the epidemic in the United States, presentations on 'proof of deliverability', dynamics of serodiscordant relationships and lessons learned from CAPRISA 004, iPrEx and Partners PrEP on adherence and effectiveness. The meeting provided a valuable opportunity for update on current and planned studies by MTN.

HIV Capacity Building Partners Summit, Kenya, March

On the 16 – 18 of March, a summit was held in Nairobi to build consensus and define concrete actions on how partners in the region will work together to develop the necessary capacity required for scaling-up HIV response in the Eastern and Southern Africa region. Pauline Irungu presented an oral abstract titled 'Blended Learning for Health Care Providers: Combining e-learning with Face to Face Interaction with Trainers and Webinar Model' highlighting the various ways in which GCM is building the capacity of public health practitioners and health care workers on HIV prevention research.

Trainings

GCM continued to host Prevention Research Literacy Trainings (PRLT) workshops in South Africa, Zambia and Kenya during the months of January through March.

News and Announcements

Howard University

Yasmin Halima was invited to be a guest lecturer at Howard University, Washington DC. The discussion focused on results from CAPRISA 004 and iPrEx trial and engaged a group of young people on the HIV prevention, and women's vulnerability globally and domestically to HIV.

GCM on Kenyan syndicated radio discussing Women and HIV prevention: On March 19, the Kenya team ran the first episode of the syndicated radio show on women and HIV prevention. This particular episode discussed the Kenyan constitution, women's health and HIV issues, looking at how women's prevention can be leveraged through the constitution. This series will run every Saturday until April 16.

New Offices: As of 24 January, the Washington DC PATH offices officially moved to its new location. Please note our new contact information.

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Advocacy Update

Equipping advocates in rural Kenya with HIV prevent advocacy skills



As we drove into Kericho town, I thought to myself, "what a beautiful town this is!" Set in an area with rolling hills covered by lush green tea plantations, the town has a thriving farming economy. However, it is experiencing a growing HIV epidemic as a result of being one of the hot spots for sex work along the Trans-African highway. The town is also hosting a HIV vaccine clinical trial site set up by the Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) and Walter Reed Project of the USA Army. It's upon this backdrop that GCM prioritized the area as a key location for engaging with community to discuss community

concerns not only related to the role of research in HIV prevention, but also to explore their perceptions related to eventual use of HIV prevention options that are currently under research, especially microbicides.

To lay a foundation for skills building GCM kicked off the activities by holding a day long dialogue on 22 February with key community leaders to understand the HIV situation in Kericho. Perspectives included those of the community, factors that fuel the epidemic, women's vulnerability to HIV, and knowledge of ongoing prevention research and access when prevention options become available.

During the discussions, it was evident that community leaders perceived a microbicide as a tool that would not only be useful in prevention but would contribute to empowerment of women in negotiating for safer sex. One participant, Janet Chepkorir, a Church leader summed this up saying, *"With a microbicide, a woman, my daughter, myself, will have a say in sexual matters and HIV prevention"*.

The leaders also saw new HIV prevention options as giving hope to the community and were poised to advocate for access to these options once they became available.

Cherotich, a woman leader underlined this saying that, *"This was my first time to hear about microbicides....as I go to the village today, I will be bragging a bit and say that I know something new that will be coming soon to the market and both women and men should prepare themselves such that when it is available. They should demand it."* They also noted the need for intensified community engagement with Daniel Rono, a civil society advocates saying that,

"There is a need to understand the social aspect of microbicides and for a social campaign."

Following the community dialogue GCM facilitated a two-day (23 – 24 February) HIV prevention research literacy training workshop for advocates, civil society members and representatives of key government departments. The aim of the workshop was to build the skills of these key stakeholders to be able to sensitize the community on ongoing HIV prevention research efforts as well as to engage in dialogue with local research institutions.



GCM Spotlight On...

Interview with Dr. Gita Ramjee

March 24th, 2011

Welcome to Spotlight On!

As a new feature of GC News, each edition will feature an interview with one of our steering committee members and stakeholders in the field. Dr. Gita Ramjee, director of the South Africa Medical Research Council's HIV Prevention Research Unit, kicks off this new series with valuable insights into her work and expectations on microbicide research.

Franziska Kabelitz: 2010 was a landmark year for HIV prevention. For South Africa it was a special year with the announcement of CAPRISA 004. With these advances what are the priorities now for HIV biomedical prevention research in South Africa over the next five years?

Dr. Gita Ramjee: The priorities are mainly confirmatory trials for both oral PrEP and topical microbicides. In addition, we will embark on implementation science to determine roll out strategies for proven HIV prevention modalities. We will also test vaginal rings and other prevention options. I think most of the research will be based on ARVs for prevention.

FK: Who is funding the research?

GR: We receive most of our support from the U.S. and some European organizations. There is considerable support also by the local Health Department through public private partnerships that promote in-country research

FK: I read in your biography on the GCM website that you have been instrumental in “addressing the needs of HIV-positive women screened out of clinical trials and those who seroconvert during the course of the trials.” How have you been addressing these issues?

GR: We’ve developed partnerships with local health providers to ensure that those tested positive are appropriately referred for care. The same applies to those who seroconvert in the trial. This has worked very well for us and is acknowledged by regulatory authorities and the community.

FK: What are some important considerations when linking communities with advocacy groups or clinical trials?

GR: Communication, education and understanding of local cultural practices and norms.

FK: Behavior change and the eradication of stigmatization are important aspects in the fight against HIV/AIDS. What are clinical trials’ capacities to affect behavior change and stigmatization? How can these issues be addressed successfully in the future?

GR: Intensive education and counseling at the clinical trial sites including safe sex behavior and disclosure of trial results is provided. We try to openly communicate this through community meetings and with women’s partners. The issue is sustainability. If people practice what they have learned, then hopefully we will make a difference.

FK: What is the most important aspect of your work, personally?

GR: I enjoy new challenges and capacity development of the next generation of researchers. The field is very exciting at the moment. But, clearly more challenging work has to be done. For me, the next steps of translating science to policy are very appealing.

FK: Where do you see your personal role in current and future research?

GR: More of a mentor but also a facilitator role moving clinical research to implementation science. It’s time for new talent to come forward and to take the field to the next level of trial implementation.

FK: Why did you accept the invitation to join GCM’s steering committee?

GR: GCM has an important role to play as advocates for HIV prevention among women. I’m impressed with their strategic plan and happy with the direction the organization is moving.

FK: Thank you very much for your time.

Dr. Gita Ramjee heads the South Africa Medical Research Council’s HIV Prevention Research Unit and is a member of GCM’s steering committee. Franziska Kabelitz is an intern with GCM’s Washington, D.C. office and a graduate student at American University. She was a student of Yasmin Halima’s “Health in Developing Countries” course in the fall 2010 semester.

Profile on Elizabeth Chiyende (Lusaka, Zambia)

GCM Program Officer



Elizabeth Chiyende is a Program Officer at GCM’s newest office in Lusaka, Zambia. Elizabeth’s role involves training HIV prevention literacy including prevention research. Since starting at GCM, Elizabeth has been busy establishing relationships with government and civil society stakeholders to support the microbicides’ research and delivery agenda.

Elizabeth stresses the importance of community involvement in her work, particularly when it comes to planning and advocacy. Furthermore, “community sensitization to help communities understand the benefits and disadvantages is very important”, says Elizabeth. There are many ways to achieve this, including

outreach through general media, community radio, and community-based drama. Says Elizabeth: "There is a need to contextualize and translate materials such as fact sheets, brochures, and posters. This will make the research more accessible and meaningful to communities."

In addition, Elizabeth strongly argues for the provision of research literacy training in order to further strengthen microbicides research. "We need to ensure that stakeholders understand the issues of

microbicides and the process of research. We've learned the hard way what happens when they don't. The more people understand the need to develop tools to protect women from HIV, the stronger the advocacy will be."

To learn more about Elizabeth's work at GCM, contact Elizabeth at echiyende@path.org

Staffing Updates

Please join us in welcoming two new Program Officers to our team - Elizabeth Chiyende in our new Zambia office and Patrick Mwai Muchai in our Kenya office. In this edition we profile Elizabeth as the newest recruit at GCM.

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