



## GC News 108

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

### Special Announcement

Call for Applications - Microbicides Research Literacy Training

### Research Updates

New lead for microbicides research

### Highlighted Resources

The University of Minnesota's short videos on new candidate

### Advocacy in Action

Coffee, cake and new prevention options on the menu

A call for renewed action against feminisation of the epidemic at the Commission on the Status of Women

GCM quoted in piece on microbicides by National Public Radio, U.S.A

### What is GCM doing this month?

+++++

### Special Announcement

#### Africa

#### Call for Applications - Microbicides Research Literacy Training

*Do you work at a trial site in Africa?*

*Are you an advocate for new prevention options?*

*Are you interested in being able to better answer questions about your work?*

You are invited to apply for the Global Campaign for Microbicides' (GCM) Microbicides Research Literacy Training.

In 2008, GCM launched the Microbicides Essentials course on-line at [www.HIVPreventionResearch.org](http://www.HIVPreventionResearch.org). In June, we will be hosting an in-person training for clinical trial staff and advocates, ***who are based from and working in Africa***, that will combine content from the Microbicides Essentials course with participatory learning activities.

The training will take place in Nairobi, Kenya on 18-19 June 2009 and will give participants the tools and practice to speak more knowledgeably and to better answer questions regarding the complexities of microbicide development and testing. Participants will be required

complete at least 3 modules of the course by CD-Rom or on-line before attending the training.

## **BENEFITS FOR PARTICIPANTS**

*In this participatory and engaging training, you will learn to:*

- Effectively describe the basic science of HIV and how microbicides work in language that is easy to understand
- Answer questions about microbicides trials.
- Address myths, misconceptions, and rumors about microbicides research.
- Access and use additional resources for further learning.

## **BENEFITS FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION OR COMMUNITY**

This training will enable participants to better communicate complex research concepts to trial participants, communities, advocates, and other relevant stakeholders. These communication skills are vital for ensuring that trials can move forward successfully, so that new prevention options can be found.

## **ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS:**

*Participants must be:*

- **Based and working in Africa.**
- Conversant in English.
- Active in the HIV prevention field--either professionally or as a recognized advocate.
- Able to travel to/from Nairobi, Kenya between the 17th and 20th of June 2009.
- Willing and able to complete a minimum of 3 Microbicides Essentials course modules (which will take approximately 6 hours to complete) by 1 June 2009. A CD-ROM disc of the course can be sent to participants who are not able to complete the course on-line at [www.hivpreventionresearch.org](http://www.hivpreventionresearch.org).

## **TO BE CONSIDERED FOR THE TRAINING:**

Download and complete the attached Microbicides Research Literacy Training Application Form at <http://www.global-campaign.org/clientfiles/MRLT-Application.doc>

Please return to GCM, using one of the methods listed below, by Wednesday, 1 April 2009:

By e-mail to [gwolnitzek@path.org](mailto:gwolnitzek@path.org)

By fax to the attention of Gary Wolnitzek at +202-457-1466

A maximum of twenty participants will be selected for this training. GCM will make the final selection of participants and notify them by email, no later than Thursday, 30 April 2009.

If you are selected, you will then need to complete 3 modules of the Microbicides Essentials course by 1 June 2009.

## **SCHOLARSHIPS**

There are a limited number of travel scholarships available to selected participants. No separate application is necessary.

Scholarships will cover the travel and accommodation costs associated with participating in the training. Details of the actual costs covered and other stipulations will be sent to scholarship recipients once they have been selected.

## **Research Updates**

## Global

### New lead for microbicides research

Researchers based at the University of Minnesota have been testing a compound used in many food products known as glycerol monolaurate (GML) to see whether it stops transmission of the primate version of HIV (known as Simian Immunodeficiency Virus or SIV) when inserted into a primate's vagina.

The findings published in Nature on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March (<http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/vaop/ncurrent/full/nature07831.html>) showed that after exposing 10 primates to SIV, all five of the primates that received GML did not contract SIV, whereas four out of the five primates that did not receive GML contracted SIV.

GML uses a new mechanism of action not seen before in microbicides research and development. As with HIV infection in humans, when SIV infection occurs in the body of a primate, T-cells (a type of white blood cell) travel to the site of the infection in order to help fight it. When this happens in HIV or SIV infection, the virus infects the T-cells themselves and "recruits" them to help spread the virus throughout the body.

GML appears to prevent T-cells from rushing to the site of infection. By stopping many T-cells from becoming infected, it may inhibit the spread of HIV. For an animation of this mechanism, go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nyLMqvBqxrQ>

News of novel leads is always a source of hope. Each dose of GML used for the research cost less than US\$ 0.01, suggesting that, if safe and effective, a GML-containing microbicide may also be affordable. Still, reaction to these data have been cautious. Principal Investigator of the GML study, Ashley Haase, M.D., has said that "there is still a lot of work to be done before planning clinical trials in humans, including additional testing in animals ...and longer term follow up studies into infections that weren't apparent in the acute stage of infection, but are manifest months later."

Reactions from other researchers and advocates have been welcoming yet cautionary, paying heed to the fact that other promising tests conducted in primates have not always led to the same results in humans. Robin Shattock, a noted London-based microbicide researcher, described the evidence on GML as "at best circumstantial". GML is also a surfactant and, as the Nature editorial underlined, "trials with another surfactant - the spermicide nonoxynol-9 - not only failed to protect women from HIV, but increased their risk of infection."

GCM director Lori Heise added that "It is good news to see more candidates emerging that are not ARV-based. While ARV-based prevention (whether oral, vaginal, or rectal) hold promise to be effective and quite potent, they also pose potential challenges at the level of implementation. Perhaps the greatest of these will be implementing a prevention strategy that requires people to know their HIV status before using it and (at least in the case of oral PrEP) obtain regular re-testing, so they know to discontinue use immediately if they seroconvert."

The pursuit of both ARV-based and non-ARV-based prevention options is essential to assure that we ultimately develop an array of tools for both primary and secondary HIV prevention. We look forward to further data that will tell us whether GML may be one of those options.

To read the press release from the University of Minnesota please go here:

<http://www.ahc.umn.edu/gml/>

### Highlighted Resources

#### North America

The University of Minnesota's short videos on their microbicides research

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmlzAn3HI-E>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nyLMqvBqxrQ>

## Advocacy in Action

### Europe

#### Coffee, cake and new prevention options on the menu

Members of the Dutch Working Group on New Prevention Technology (NPT) gathered at Amsterdam's Star Ferry Café on 22<sup>nd</sup> January to share the latest scientific news and coordinate advocacy strategies in an informal and relaxed atmosphere.

In a meeting similar in style to the Buzz Cafés that have been held by the UK African Working Group on Microbicides and inspired by GCM's practice of actors working together, members discussed a range of hot topics including male circumcision, PrEP, the HPTN 035 results and the need for European donors to support community based advocacy in these areas through the mechanism of a small grants fund. The session was attended by Marije Wijnrocks from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and organised by AIDS Fonds, other attendees were STI AIDS Netherlands, GNP+ and the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative as well as the Global Campaign for Microbicides.

For more information or to join the NPT Group, please contact Irene Keizer at AIDS Fonds.



Pictured from left to right: Georgina Caswell (GNP+); Elly Hassink (STI AIDS Netherlands); Sam Gobin (Aid Fonds); Rebekah Webb (GCM); Irene Keizer (Aids Fonds); Hester Kuipers (IAVI); Moniek van der Kroef (STOP AIDS NOW); Arwa Meijer (GCM); Marijke Wijnroks (Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

## A call for renewed action for women and HIV by Michel Sidibé

### Global

"Nothing short of a social revolution is now required to deliver on the commitments we have made to gender equality", was the ringing proclamation of Dr. Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS during his speech at the 53<sup>rd</sup> session of the UN's Commission on the Status of Women.

Dr. Sidibé, known for his support of new HIV prevention technologies (see GC News #104 at <http://www.global-campaign.org/GCArchives.htm>) spoke loudly and clearly about his very real fear that the global economic crisis will affect women and girls in particular, as gender-based violence escalates and resources diminish..

Highlighting three priority actions including 1) giving women and girls the power to protect themselves from HIV 2) respecting and protecting human rights by breaking down gender construction within societies and 3) shifting the development agenda from poverty reduction alone to integrating respect for rights and dignity, Sidibé also said "I agree with Bill Gates that we need new tools that allow women to protect themselves and echoed Gates' observation that "a woman should never need her partner's permission to save her own life."

Sidibé closed with a call to all to work together to achieve universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, as well as gender equality. His speech can be viewed here:

[www.data.unaids.org/pub/SpeechEXD/2009/20090302\\_SP\\_MS\\_csw\\_en.pdf](http://www.data.unaids.org/pub/SpeechEXD/2009/20090302_SP_MS_csw_en.pdf)

### **GCM quoted in piece on microbicides by National Public Radio, U.S.A** **North America**

National Public Radio in the U.S. presented a radio piece on microbicides with quotes from GCM Director, Lori Heise. It centers on the ongoing debates between the "hopefuls" and the "skeptics" of microbicide research and development. Based on an initial interview with Tachi Yamada of the Gates Foundation, the story also includes comment from Dr. Sharon Hillier of the Microbicide Trials Network, GCM Director Lori Heise and others that contextualize the research and stress the urgent need to find an effective microbicide.

To listen visit:

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=101631646>

### **Good News on the Female Condom Front and Two US Policy Appointments** **North America**

On March 11, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the FC2 female condom, a second generation product manufactured by the Female Health Company. GCM was among the many NGOs calling for this decision at FDA hearings last December. The FC2 is made of a softer material (nitrile) for quieter use and costs less to manufacture than the FC1. The company anticipates a public sector price that is as much as 30 percent less than FC1, contingent on volumes of procurement. As public sector sales increase, even further cost reductions may be possible.

FDA approval enables USAID to procure the FC2 at a lower unit cost for U.S.-funded prevention programs around the world. FC2 has also been approved by other regulatory agencies, including the European Union and agencies in India and Brazil. The World Health Organization (WHO) approved FC2 for purchase by UN agencies in 2006. GCM is among those advocating vigorously for much broader female condom promotion and distribution globally, given that they currently less than 1% of the world condom supply (see GC News Issue #94 at <http://www.global-campaign.org/clientfiles/GCNews94.pdf>).

### **What is GCM doing this month?**

#### **Global**

#### **21<sup>st</sup> March, Kenya**

HERAF (Health Rights Advocacy forum) and GCM will co-convene a training for nursing students on woman-initiated HIV prevention options with the aim of introducing upcoming healthcare workers to emerging woman-initiated tools and engaging them as advocates on the issue.

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> April, South Africa**

At the upcoming Southern African AIDS Conference (March 31 – April 3) in Durban:

MMCI Coordinator, Deborah Baron, will be chairing a media training entitled 'Trial and Error: HIV Prevention Clinical Trials and the Media' on April 2 at 11:00am.

GCM and AVAC are co-convening a session entitled 'Community Involvement in Clinical Trials – Watchdogs or Rubber Stamps?' to assess the role of communities in current and future HIV prevention clinical trials. This session is scheduled for 3:30 pm on April 2.