



Global Campaign News October 25, 2002

Welcome to the biweekly *Global Campaign News*! The *Global Campaign News* is a forum for international exchange on microbicide activities and information with an aim to build a more informed and integrated movement for microbicide development and other prevention options against HIV and STDs.

We welcome your input and contributions. Correspondence can be addressed to info@global-campaign.org. If you would like to unsubscribe to the Global Campaign News, please reply to this e-mail with the subject line: UNSUBSCRIBE.

In this issue:

Lemon Juice: No data on Safety or Effectiveness as a Microbicide

URGENT Action, National Women's Health Network

Female-Controlled Methods ranked among Top 10 Biotechnologies for Improving Health
Overview of Dual Protection, Progress in Reproductive Health Research

New "Low Lit" brochures in English and Spanish

Pacific Institute for Women's Health looking for Policy Officer, Microbicides

Lemon Juice: No data on Safety or Effectiveness as a microbicide

On October 10, Reuters News Service reported that reproductive physiologist Roger Short had stated that lemon juice is effective as both a microbicide and a contraceptive. Roger V. Short, professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Melbourne, and his research team have completed initial in vitro experiments on lemon juice's ability to inactivate HIV and sperm. According to Reuters, during the filming of an Australian Broadcasting Corp television program, Short observed: "We can show in the lab that lemon juice is very effective in immobilizing human sperm and also very effective in killing HIV."

Media coverage of the announcement has created lots of excitement, together with the risk that people will assume that the in vitro data are adequate to demonstrate the effectiveness of lemon juice as a microbicide. Short aided this mistaken impression by recommending on Australian television that women squeeze lemon or lime juice onto a piece of sponge or cotton wool and insert it into the vagina before sex. "This has been used for hundreds of years and we've just forgotten about it," said Short.

In an earlier report published in the Bangkok Post on August 12, 2002, Short clarified that "We need more time to study whether lemon juice can kill sperm and the HIV/AIDS virus in the human body without any side effect." Although his seven-month lab test showed promising results in vitro, they obviously could not show the effect of lemon juice in humans and what side effects, if any, vaginal use of it might generate. An Australian government agency called VicHealth is now funding Short's team to explore

the effect of vaginal application of lemon juice on macaque monkeys on Bogor Island, Indonesia, according to the Bangkok Post. If those trials are successful, human trials enrolling young women in Asia and South Africa are expected.

Microbicide advocates will recall press coverage in late 2001 suggesting that over-the-counter sexual lubricants such as Astroglide and Vagisil could be used as effective microbicides. These reports extrapolated from data published by University of Texas researcher Samuel Baron indicating that these products kill HIV in a test tube. As with Dr. Short's lemon juice data, the scientific findings behind these reports was very limited and showed only that the products under consideration kill HIV in a test tube. In reality, no data have yet been produced in either case indicating whether or not these products cause irritation or other problems when used internally on an on-going basis.

It is always tempting to imagine that we already have products at hand that could meet the urgent need for non-condom prevention tools. If nothing else, the N-9 experience has to have taught us that we must not make assumptions about a product's safety or effectiveness without adequate data.

Part of our responsibility as advocates is to insist that products presented to the public as microbicides first be proven to be both safe and effective for use as microbicides.

URGENT ACTION NEEDED -- Bush Selection Favors Prayer for PMS and Opposes the Use of Contraception by Unmarried Women

Amy Allina, National Women's Health Network

President Bush has announced his plan to select Dr. W. David Hager to head up the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Reproductive Health Drugs Advisory Committee. Hager is a practicing obstetrician-gynecologist, and sources told Time magazine that in his private practice he would not prescribe contraceptives to unmarried women. He is also the author of a book that suggests that women who suffer from premenstrual syndrome should seek help from reading the bible and praying.

The Reproductive Health Drugs Advisory Committee is responsible for offering expert scientific and medical advice to the FDA on matters relating to drugs used in the practice of obstetrics, gynecology, and related specialties. The committee's responsibilities include all contraceptive drugs and drugs used in performing medical abortion as well as drugs used for infertility treatments, hormone replacement therapy and labor and delivery.

The National Women's Health Network urges you to email President Bush at president@whitehouse.gov or call the White House at 202-456-1111 to say that you oppose the appointment of Dr. Hager to the FDA Reproductive Health Drugs Advisory Committee and ask the president to select a committee chair with a track record of making medical decisions based on science instead of religion. If you send an email

please send a copy to the National Women's Health Network office at jwashington@womenshealthnetwork.org.

Female-Controlled Methods Ranked in Top 10 Biotechnologies for Improving Health

The University of Toronto's Joint Centre for Bioethics (JCB) recently released a study identifying the 10 biotechnologies with the greatest promise of improving global health within a decade, particularly in the world's poorer countries. "Female-controlled protection against sexually transmitted diseases, both with and without contraceptive effect" rank 6th out of the "Top 10" in the collective opinion of 28 eminent international scientists and experts in genome-related technology and global health issues.

According to the report: "The global burden of STIs is felt most heavily by women, yet they have few means of effective protection that do not rely upon their partner's consent. Biotechnology is enabling the development of a number of new forms of female-controlled protection against STIs, such as recombinant vaccines, monoclonal antibodies, and new approaches to the development of **vaginal microbicides**, which are discreet, topically-applied barriers to infection. Advances in this area could have a significant impact on women's health, and reduce the spread of STIs among the general population."

You can find the results of the study in *Nature Genetics*, Vol. 32, October 2002, and the complete report at <http://www.utoronto.ca/jcb/>. Chapter 6 of the full report is on female-controlled barrier methods.

Overview of Dual Protection, Progress in Reproductive Health Research

Progress, a quarterly distributed by UNDP/UNFPA/WHO/World Bank, recently came out with an issue on dual protection -- the importance of integrating family planning and STI/HIV prevention. The issue summarizes available results of studies done in 6 African countries on how men rate the importance and convenience of condoms as a dual protection method in relation to contraceptives alone. The issue also discusses the female condom and microbicides as two alternative and woman-controlled methods. With cost being one barrier to female condom use, the issue focuses on current studies on the reuse of female condoms and concerns of safety and efficacy.

The issue also examines the challenges ahead for making microbicides available on the market. In particular, it looks at the feasibility of one possible microbicide: cellulose sulfate gel now in Phase I clinical trials.

The edition also examines the spermicide Nonoxynol-9 that has recently been shown not to offer protection against STDs and HIV. For your reference, the report includes a "Do's and Don'ts in a Nutshell" about N-9, put together by experts at a meeting convened October 2001 by the World Health Organization and Contraceptive Research and Development (CONRAD). For the full issue, see: <http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/hrp/progress/59/news59%20john%20latest.pdf>.

Low literacy brochures on the website

Two new brochures, "*If only women had another way....*", or "*Si las mujeres tuvieramos otra manera...*", now offer an easily accessible explanation of the need for microbicide advocacy. The brochures were written, designed and translated by members of the Pennsylvania Campaign for Microbicides, who decided that they needed something to accompany the legislative postcards they are were putting out at clinics, social service agencies and health fairs. Having collected and sent over 2200 signed postcards to date (urging Congressional support for the Microbicides Development Act), the Pennsylvania advocates are now convinced that giving people understandable information about the issue helps encourage them to get involved by signing a postcard. The text on the brochures registers as readable for people with seventh to eighth grade educations (according to the SMOG formula and the Gunning Fog Index).

PA Campaign Site coordinator Kerri Barthel observed, "people can understand almost any issue if they see its relevance to their own lives and if it's explained well enough. We know this issue is crucially important to most women, so we just had to come up with a way of presenting it that was familiar and comfortable. We are very much hoping to get feedback from other people who use this brochure about how we can make it even more accessible."

Anyone wishing to adapt these two pieces for local use can download them at www.global-campaign.org/download.htm under Public Education Resources and Tools and Materials in Spanish.

Pacific Institute for Women's Health looking for Policy Officer, Microbicides

The Policy Officer will primarily serve as the coordinator of CAMI – the California affiliate of the Global Campaign for Microbicides. CAMI is a statewide coalition of 25 organizations whose mission is to mobilize political and fiscal resources for the development and testing of products to prevent the transmission of HIV. In addition to chairing the steering committee and coordinating meetings, the Policy Officer will work on HIV prevention issues through activities such as conducting advocacy at the state and local level, providing outreach to community-based organizations, making presentations at professional conferences, speaking to the media and fundraising. For information about applying see: www.piwh.org.