



Global Campaign News – Issue #32 March 19, 2004

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. Previous issues of GC News are available online at <http://www.global-campaign.org/gcnews.htm>

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Find the Global Campaign at Microbicides 2004 in London

The Microbicides 2004 conference will be held March 28-31 in London - www.microbicides2004.org. Below are some quick highlights of where you can find the Global Campaign, and some additional items of interest. If you would like us to highlight your event, please e-mail us back with your details and we will update our list via our website: <http://www.global-campaign.org/microbicides2004.htm>

Sunday, 27 March, 8:30am – 2:30pm, Imperial College in London.

Please join us for the Global Campaign for Microbicides Pre-Conference Event - "Microbicides Overview for Advocates". This pre-conference will give you the background and the understanding of pressing issues in the microbicides field. You will receive overviews on the science, research and development, and clinical trials as well as learn about what you can do as advocates to organize around access, community involvement in clinical trials and resource mobilization. For more information and to REGISTER for this free pre-conference, click on [Microbicides 2004 Pre-Conference](http://www.global-campaign.org/microbicides2004.htm) - <http://www.global-campaign.org/microbicides2004.htm>.

Monday, 29 March, 4-5.30pm

Microbicides Introduction in Tamil Nadu, India: Policy Makers' Perspectives – Poster by Ananthi Thambinayagam. Ananthi's study assessed the opinions of 17 key policy-makers on the potential public health, political and socio-cultural issues that are likely to be barriers or catalysts for the introduction of microbicides in Tamil Nadu, India.

Wednesday, 31 March, 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Global Campaign staffer Anna Forbes, together with Will Nutland of Terrence Higgins Trust (UK) and Jim Pickett of LifeLube.org (North America), will be making an oral presentation on "Engaging gay men in microbicide advocacy". This presentation will be part of an advocacy panel chaired by Elizabeth McGrory and Charlotte Watts. Other advocacy perspectives presented by this panel include: "Advocating for microbicide using a sexual rights framework: Lessons from South Africa", "Advocating for microbicides in the global south: approaches and methods" and "HIV treatments, microbicides and vaccines: advancing a rights-based agenda for research, development and access".

Other Events of Interest:

Monday 29 March 2004. 12.30 – 14.00 p.m. Venue To Be Announced

African Microbicides Advocacy Group (AMAG) Consultation: Priority Issues & Actions in Microbicides Advocacy in Africa. AMAG defines itself as a small but growing group of committed advocates from a wide range of backgrounds including activists, researchers, scientists, policy makers, service providers and programme managers. AMAG is gearing up for concerted and collective advocacy action to push the Microbicides agenda in a way that recognizes our context and perspectives as advocates in Africa. To reserve a space & for more information, contact: Promise Mthembu, pmthembu@icw.org or Manju Chatani, mchatani@internetghana.com. A light lunch will be served.

Monday, 29 March, 6-8pm. Balmoral Room, Hilton London Metropole. Join the Board and staff of the International Partnership for Microbicides for an update of the microbicide community.

Indian women's groups emphasize holistic approach to HIV

Members of the Joint Action Front for Women, a coalition of Indian NGOs working on a spectrum of women's issues, tackled women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS—some for the first time. The day-long seminar on February 25th, 2004 called “The Growing Menace of HIV/AIDS and Prevention Options for Women” was organized by the Center for Social Research in New Delhi, conveners of the Joint Action Front for Women. While member organizations have a long record of political activism in areas of women's reproductive and human rights, globalization, the environment, and legal and property issues, most have only recently begun to explore how these issues affect women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS in India. The 30 representatives who participated in the seminar discussed many ways in which women must be supported in order to be better able to protect themselves, including efforts to reduce stigma, increase access to accurate information, increase responsibility by men and women, and access to women-controlled prevention methods. “The vulnerability of women to this disease is an issue that must be addressed by a strong political will that is supported by an effective grassroots advocacy campaign to develop inclusive policies that address the spectrum of issues that affect women,” said Dr. Ranjana Kumari, CSR director. Project director for the Indian National AIDS Control Organization (NACO), Dr. Meenakshi Dutta Ghosh, emphasized this vulnerability in her remarks by focusing on the need for convergence of government activities, particularly in the areas of HIV prevention and reproductive and child health.

CondomDepot.com discontinues sale of all products containing N-9

On February 26, CondomDepot.com, a leading on-line condom retailer in the U.S., announced that it had discontinued sale of all products containing N-9. As the first major condom retailer to take this step, CondomDepot.com President Kimberly Fidi said the decision was made primarily in response to CDC and WHO recommendations but was also influenced by complaints from customers who experienced irritation after N-9 condom use.

A few CondomDepot.com customers, angered by the decision, have switched to other retailers in order to buy N-9 condoms. But the company doesn't expect a major economic impact as a result of this decision and reports that most public queries regarding the new policy end positively when customers are advised about the potential risks associated with N-9 condom use.

According to the US Drug IRI (Nov. 30, 2003, “Impact of Nonoxynol-9 on Category Sales”), the sale of condoms coated with Nonoxynol-9 decreased by only 5% in 2003. This substantiates behavioral research

suggesting that many people still purchase N-9 condoms in the mistaken belief that they provide more protection than condoms without N-9.

The Global Campaign for Microbicides, together with other endorsers of the 2002 "Call to Discontinue Nonoxynol-9", is considering the possibility of focusing its N-9-related advocacy on efforts to get other major retailers to stop selling N-9 condoms. It is becoming increasingly evident, as the retail sale of them continues virtually unabated, that since the fastest way to get people to stop using N-9 condoms is simply to get them off the shelves.

“MTV advocacy” at Indian NGO convention

The Indian Network of NGO's on HIV and AIDS (IN-N) held its 8th National Convention in Lucknow on February 22-24, 2004. IN-N has advocated for female condoms and microbicides in India and globally since 2001. At the 2004 conference, Mr. Sam Avrett gave a keynote presentation on aligning advocacy strategies for HIV microbicides, vaccines and treatment research, informally known as “MTV.” The trend towards aligning strategies has been growing in the last year as advocates from the three disciplines recognize the common issues to all. These issues include resource mobilization for advocacy as well as for research, the need to maintain high quality research and development with high ethical standards and meaningful community involvement, issues of patents, pricing and regulation for new essential technologies, and overcoming barriers to access and use. The HIV/AIDS Unit of the India-based Lawyers' Collective has been a key player in developing the “MTV” dialogue in India. Members of the Indian Network of NGOs discussed possibilities for incorporating ‘MTV’ advocacy into the efforts already underway. They identified their strengths as the ability to demonstrate demand for new technologies, focusing on a rights-based approach to research and development, and maintaining accountability of governments, donors and institutions involved in microbicide, vaccine and treatment research, development and delivery.

Dublin conference highlights need for microbicides

On February 23-24, at a landmark conference and the largest high-level meeting to be convened on HIV by the European Union, microbicides received recognition as an important new technology in the fight against HIV. Global Campaign Europe partners, in particular Cairde, the International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (ICW) and the Swedish Red Cross played a strong role in getting microbicides into the “Dublin Declaration on Partnership to Fight HIV/AIDS in Europe and Central Asia”, a collaborative document that came out of this conference among representatives of States and Governments from Europe and Central Asia. Among its many other recommendations, the Declaration urged governments to increase resources for new prevention technologies.

Microbicides also received a clear endorsement from some key global figures at the conference. In his opening address, EU Minister for Development Cooperation Tom Kitts drew government attention to the need for vaccines and other new prevention tools as a vital part of the response to HIV. Carol Bellamy, head of UNICEF, articulated the limits of existing HIV prevention strategies for women, in particular those who wish to conceive. Mary Robinson, former head of the UN Commission for Human Rights, championed the importance of microbicides and made a strong plea for greater public support. Later Mary Robinson also highlighted the need for microbicides and women-controlled prevention methods during an interview on the 6 o'clock news on Irish national television.

HIV is now firmly on the European Union agenda. With the successive presidencies of the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and the UK to follow, the European Union could make an immense difference for many millions of people around the world, by increasing its collective support for microbicide research and

country-level preparedness. The Global Campaign's role now will be to ensure that they hold firm to the Dublin commitment.

Microbicides receive heightened visibility at the CROI

by Laurie Sylla, Yale School of Nursing

Microbicides were highlighted center stage at the 11th Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections held in San Francisco from 8-11 February 2004. This is the major annual scientific conference on HIV/AIDS held in the US. Stephen Lewis, UN Special Envoy on HIV/AIDS in Africa, delivered a rousing opening keynote address underscoring how gender inequity combined with HIV is killing women and devastating societies. In addition to calling for structural and cultural change, he made an urgent plea for microbicides, expressing incredulity that microbicide development is not being treated as one of the greatest of political priorities.

Robin Shattock, MD, of St. George's Hospital Medical School in London, addressed "How Close Are We to An Effective Microbicide?" at the first plenary session of the conference. He presented information on our increased understanding of the dynamics of HIV-1 transmission, how that knowledge is shaping the development of new and more sophisticated strategies for topical intervention via microbicides, and the major developments, opportunities, and hurdles in the development of different biological approaches. He concluded that depending on the (1) level of financial investment, (2) likelihood that any of the early frontrunners in clinical trials demonstrate effectiveness, and (3) decisions made on how to select products in the pipeline for large scale clinical trials, we are five to fifteen years from having a microbicide on the market.

In addition, there were six posters and three oral abstracts presented on preclinical development. This is the most visibility microbicides have ever received at this important scientific conference.

Hindustan Times article: Giving women the tool to stay away from HIV

The following article, by Rakesh Goswami, appeared in the Lucknow edition of Hindustan Times, a national Indian English daily on February 22, 2004. Editor's note: this article is reproduced here because it is not yet available on the Hindustan Times website, www.hindustantimes.com

The current HIV prevention strategies seem to have widened the gender divide. Men can prevent infection by monogamy, condom use, reduction in number of partners and treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). How many prevention options do women have? Even when they stick to only one partner, they can be at risk through that partner's other relationships. Most of them simply do not have the power to insist that he use condoms. Diagnosis and treatment of STIs are either not available for them or stigmatized. That many of these infections are without symptoms in women compounds the problem.

"This, precisely, is the reason for mobilization for microbicides the world over," says Megan Gottemoeller, international programme coordinator for Global Campaign for Microbicides.

A microbicide is a woman-controlled method applied before sex that could kill, neutralize, or block HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. No safe and effective microbicide is currently available to the public, but scientists are pursuing over 60 product leads. Four of these products are undergoing clinical trials in India.

Gottemoeller is here [in Lucknow, India] to attend the VIII national convention of IN-N, beginning Sunday at Ganna Sansthan auditorium. She says an effective topical microbicide could be on the market by 2007.

The National AIDS Research Institute (NARI) in Pune is conducting clinical trials of PRO 2000/5 gel and Praneem, a poly-herbal tablet – the latter in collaboration with Obstetrics and Gynecology Department of Sassoon General Hospital. The phase I safety study of Praneem at the National Institute of Research in Reproductive Health, Mumbai, was found safe when used once daily for 7 days. NARI was also part of the multi-centric, multinational safety and acceptability study of BufferGel in 1997. This product was found safe when used for 14 consecutive days between menstruations amongst HIV low risk sexually active and abstinent women.

Neelam Joglekar, behavioural scientist at NARI, will make a presentation on ‘prevention options for women: clinical trials in India’ on Day 1 of the INN convention.

Gottemoeller says women need education, economic opportunity, social support and transformation of gender relationships so that they are able to protect their health and rights within partnerships, and HIV and STI prevention methods they control, such as female condoms and microbicides.

Union Health Minister Sushma Swaraj recently launched the female condom in India. These had been available in Europe since 1992 and were approved by the FDA in 1993. The female condom is stronger than the male condom and less likely to break. Besides, it can be used up to 8 hours before intercourse.

We welcome your input and contributions for future issues! 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.