



## Global Campaign News – Issue #33 April 15, 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. This and previous issues of GC News are available online at <http://www.global-campaign.org/gcnews.htm>

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### Highlights from Microbicides 2004

Eight hundred advocates, scientists, researchers, donors, and policy makers from 53 countries assembled in London from March 28-31 for the third conference solely dedicated to microbicides – Microbicides 2004. Much of the discussion focused on the anticipated launch of five large effectiveness trials of six different candidate microbicides: BufferGel, Carraguard, Cellulose Sulfate, Emmelle (dextrin sulfate), PRO 2000, and Savvy (C31G).

More information about these discussions is available at the aidsmap website:

<http://www.aidsmap.com/news/newsdisplay2.asp?newsId=2643>

Other highlights covered this edition of GC News, include:

- The inaugural meeting of the Africa Microbicides Advocacy Group (AMAG)
- The IPM's announcement about their agreement with Tibotec, a subsidiary of Johnson & Johnson. (see below)
- The Global Campaign's pre-conference workshop at M2004.

Finally, Stephen Lewis, the UN Special Envoy on HIV/AIDS in Africa, provided conference participants with a sobering account of the vulnerability of women and the toll that HIV/AIDS has taken on Sub-Saharan Africa. He spoke with rage and passion about the need to make changes now. He concluded with, "I ask only that you see microbicides, not merely as one of the great scientific pursuits of the age, but as a significant emancipation for women whose cultural, social and economic inheritance have put them so gravely at risk. Never in human history have so many died for so little reason. You have a chance to alter the course of that history. Can there be any task more noble?" The entire speech is available at: <http://www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/docs/2004-03-30.%20Microbicides%202004.%20London.doc>

Abstracts of the conference are available at: [www.microbicides2004.com](http://www.microbicides2004.com)

### Africa Microbicides Advocacy Group Holds Inaugural Meeting

*Re-printed from Gender-AIDS listserv, Health and Development Networks, 3 April 2004*

On the sidelines of the on-going 2004 Microbicides conference in London, a group of about 70 people gathered to chart the direction for microbicides in Africa. The Africa Microbicides Advocacy Group (AMAG) was conceived at the IFH/Global Campaign 2003 Advocates meeting held this past November in London. African advocates attending the meeting sought to initiate the forum as a vehicle of articulating African issues relating to microbicides.

The group took advantage of the many delegates attending the Biennial conference to introduce AMAG. The inaugural meeting was meant to identify the critical issues that need to be addressed relating to Microbicides in Africa. "This meeting was meant to introduce AMAG to delegates and identify issues. We are happy the turn out was impressive and people contributed well," said Dawn Cavanagh, a committee member. According to Manju Chatani, AMAG committee member, the group hopes to start structured email discussions where members can participate and raise issues relating to Microbicides.

While committee members appreciated that financial constraints affect every organisation in Africa, delegates were asked to identify other issues that need to be addressed. Political will, training and education of participating communities (both male and female), information dissemination, development of health systems and ethical issues were identified as the major challenges facing the continent. Though the meeting mainly concerned Africa, representatives from Philippines, Argentina, USA, and UK among others, attended.

Africa is a major player in microbicides research and development because many of the trials are taking place in sub Saharan Africa. The continent is plagued by low levels of literacy, lack of political will in science matters and collapsing health systems. "This meeting is meant to bring everyone together, galvanise some action as Africans, and collaborate with others in the region," said Kim Dickson, a committee member (a member of the GCM Steering Committee). Dickson emphasised that the inaugural meeting will help advocates raise awareness in their communities and to their governments too.

At the end of the one and a half hour meeting, participants were optimistic that their input will further assist the continent to stop the spread of HIV infection that is currently affecting 25 million Africans.

For more information about AMAG and to get involved, write to Manju Chatani at [manju\\_chatani@hotmail.com](mailto:manju_chatani@hotmail.com)

## **Big Pharma gives IPM rights to test, manufacture and develop drug**

On March 29, The International Partnership for Microbicides (IPM) announced that Tibotec Pharmaceuticals Ltd., had awarded them the royalty-free right to test, manufacture, and distribute a potentially microbicidal gel containing TMC-120 in resource poor countries. The gel is currently in Phase I safety testing, and the IPM will assume responsibility for the product's development after Phase II is completed. IPM will also look to develop other formulations with TMC120, both alone and in combination with other active ingredients.

TMC-120, also known as dapivirine, belongs to the class of drugs known as NNRTIs (non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors). It was originally developed as an HIV treatment, but trials were abandoned because it was not absorbed into the bloodstream when taken as an oral medicine. Its lack of absorption makes it particularly suitable for a topical gel for use in the vagina or rectum.

Tibotec, a Belgian subsidiary of Johnson & Johnson, will continue funding the compound through Phase II testing. IPM will then bear the costs of further testing (estimated US \$50 million to \$100 million), manufacturing, and distribution in developing countries. Johnson & Johnson retains the rights to TMC 120 in developed countries, but will have to pay a royalty on profits to IPM.

## **Advocates' Workshop at Microbicides 2004**

"Clinical trials BINGO" may have been the high point, but new information and lively debates kept participants busy and vocal at the Advocates' Pre-Conference Workshop, sponsored by the Global Campaign at the Microbicides 2004 Conference in London. Begun at Microbicides 2002, the Campaign's Pre-conference Workshop provides a comprehensive overview and update of the issues in microbicides science and policy, orienting participants to the issues discussed at the conference and in the field. This year, Global Campaign partners also shared the different advocacy strategies that work with their constituencies, giving an opportunity for feedback and exchange of ideas.

New information included an overview of clinical trials and the current product pipeline, and the introduction the Microbicide Research and Development Database, an exciting new tool for keeping up to date on microbicides and clinical trials. The database, by the Alliance for Microbicide Development, is available on their website [www.microbicide.org](http://www.microbicide.org). Other topics included:

- ethical reasoning on issues of standard of care,
- data on “condom migration,” with the introduction of microbicides
- how to ensure widespread access to successful microbicides
- other female barrier methods, with samples
- acceptability, focusing on providers and policy-makers in India
- community involvement in clinical trials, with discussion on mobilization, accountability and male involvement.

The presentations will be available at the Global Campaign website: [www.global-campaign.org/microbicides2004.htm](http://www.global-campaign.org/microbicides2004.htm)

## Challenges in Rectal Microbicide Development

“Challenges in Rectal Microbicide Development” a pre-conference symposium held at the Royal College of Medicine on March 28, provided an eye-opening introduction to the topic. The first public, scientific symposium of its kind, the session highlighted a topic that is seldom discussed, even in microbicides circles. To place it in a “real life” context, Pamina Gorbach, a researcher at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) AIDS Institute, showed a clip from “Sex in the City” (a popular US soap opera) in which four women friends discuss anal sex. Though humorous, the characters’ conversation illustrated the stigmatized nature of the topic and paved the way for presentations of behavioral data on women and anal sex in the US and Africa.

A review of estimated prevalence suggests that seven times more unprotected anal sex may be occurring among US women than among US men having sex with men. African data presented in the symposium and at larger conference confirmed that, while not uncommon, anal sex is also a topic seldom discussed among most African women.

Symposium presentations focused mainly on advances and challenges in rectal microbicide development, which has proceeded at pre-clinical levels to date. Animal and tissue explant models have enabled scientists to pursue the questions of how to develop a microbicide that does not damage the fragile structure of the rectal lining, how product could be delivered effectively and how to assure sufficient coverage of the rectal cavity.

Conference organizer Iam McGowan (also from UCLA) moderated a closing roundtable on the future of rectal microbicide research. While the questions before the field are difficult, high quality of scientific effort is now being put into answering them. Finally, the field recognizes that substantial populations of receptive sex partners, female and male, need rectal microbicides and that research to develop them must proceed apace.

## Microbicides featured in the Lancet

In both a feature article and a commentary, the Lancet’s March 27<sup>th</sup> edition featured microbicides. The articles discuss women’s vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, the need for microbicides, the potential viral and cellular targets for microbicides, and research and development updates. These articles are available at [www.lancet.com](http://www.lancet.com) or [www.global-campaign.org/clientfiles/Lancet\\_Shattock.pdf](http://www.global-campaign.org/clientfiles/Lancet_Shattock.pdf) and [www.global-campaign.org/clientfiles/Lancet\\_Mar\\_2004.pdf](http://www.global-campaign.org/clientfiles/Lancet_Mar_2004.pdf)

## Report available from meeting of Indian Women’s Groups

The report of the seminar on “The Growing Menace of HIV/AIDS and Prevention Options for Women,” organized by the Center for Social Research together with the Global Campaign, is now available. The report contains an overview by Ms. Meenakshi Dutta Ghosh of NACO’s program for addressing issues of women and HIV in India, an

analysis of gender-based vulnerability to HIV from Dr. Suneeta Dhar of UNIFEM, a look at female prevention methods as one set of tools for addressing this vulnerability, and a discussion of the potential role of women's organizations in advocating for these issues. In addition, CSR presents data from their survey of adolescent sexual behavior in Delhi slums, with alarming insights about the urgent need to expand prevention methods and be a strong voice for mobilizing action in India.

The document is available on the Global Campaign site:

Download a pdf version (pdf file) – 2,518 KB [www.global-campaign.org/clientfiles/CSR\\_GrowingMenace.pdf](http://www.global-campaign.org/clientfiles/CSR_GrowingMenace.pdf)

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