



## Global Campaign News – Issue #36 June 4, 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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### Nigeria: “New Converts” to Microbicide Advocacy

The Nigerian HIV Vaccine and Microbicide Advocacy Group (NHVMAG) introduced microbicide advocacy to a gathering of Nigeria’s scientists, public health, policy and NGO community. Dr. Morenike Ukpung, co-convenor of NHVMAG, presented the complementary nature of microbicides and vaccines at a meeting on vaccine and treatment research in Nigeria, sponsored by the Gede Foundation in Abuja on May 25. The presentation sparked interest from participants who had heard about microbicides but wanted to know more. Several attended a workshop hosted by NHVMAG on May 26 and 27. Researchers discussed the numerous initiatives underway in Nigeria to contribute to the development of an HIV vaccine. Others described the microbicides clinical trials beginning in four cities in Nigeria. The group went on to plan ways of raising awareness, building political commitment, and ensuring community involvement in clinical trials of new prevention technologies. One participant remarked, “I came here as a vaccine advocate. Now I have been converted to a microbicide advocate as well.”

NHVMAG is a network of advocates, researchers, policy makers and community organizers working to promote the development of safe, effective and accessible vaccines and microbicides for Nigeria. To learn more about NHVMAG or to get a report of the meeting, visit [www.nhvmag.org](http://www.nhvmag.org)

### U.S. Congressional Confusion on N-9 -- the Facts and the Debate

In a March 22, 2004 a U.S. House of Representatives’ Government Reform Committee memo urged the FDA to pull all Nonoxynol-9 (N-9) products from the market until “the safety and effectiveness of N-9 use can be proven”.

While public health authorities widely agree that N-9 should not be used for disease prevention, vaginal contraceptive products containing N-9 remain an important contraceptive option for women who are not at risk of HIV. Roland Foster, the author of the memo, has mixed up discussion of N-9 as a contraceptive with data about its failed potential as a microbicide – distorting the whole picture in an effort to get the FDA to reduce women’s contraceptive options.

Our response to this recent initiative can be seen at the global campaign website at [http://www.global-campaign.org/clientfiles/N9Memo\\_June04.doc](http://www.global-campaign.org/clientfiles/N9Memo_June04.doc) Advocates are encouraged to use this response to clarify any confusion that the mixed messages Foster is promoting may generate. The short version of our take on the issue is:

1. **N-9 used rectally (on condoms or in lubricants) is dangerous and should be discouraged.** There is no benefit to using condoms or lubricants with N-9, and N-9 causes rectal tissue damage that might increase risk of HIV.

2. N-9 used vaginally is an important contraceptive option for some women as long as they are aware that the N-9 could enhance HIV risk, if a woman at risk of HIV exposure uses such products frequently.

If you have any questions about this issue or the following, please feel free to contact Anna Forbes at the Global Campaign, [asforbes@path-dc.org](mailto:asforbes@path-dc.org)

## Women's Right to Microbicides: Conditional or Unconditional?"

Last September, Eran Karmon, Malcolm Potts and Wayne Getz published a controversial journal article critiquing the ability of mathematical models to assess accurately "the potential effects of microbicide introduction and ... the danger posed by non-target groups (e.g. condom users) taking up microbicides in favor of condoms" (a phenomenon usually referred to as condom migration). Entitled, "Microbicides and HIV: Help or Hindrance?" the article appeared in the September 1, 2003 issue of the Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (JAIDS), Vol. 34, No. 1, pages 71 -75. The dramatic predictions provided by such mathematical models, they wrote "serve more as a call to action for careful surveillance and assessment of a population before microbicides are introduced than as a way of foretelling the future."

At the Microbicides 2004 conference in London last March, University of Pennsylvania researcher Erica Gollub presented an alternative view in her poster presentation entitled, "Women's Right to Microbicides: Conditional or Unconditional?". (the abstract is available on line at [http://www.microbicides2004.org.uk/abstract/posters/c\\_02628\\_2.html](http://www.microbicides2004.org.uk/abstract/posters/c_02628_2.html) and the complete poster is available at [http://www.global-campaign.org/clientfiles/Gollub\\_M2004.doc](http://www.global-campaign.org/clientfiles/Gollub_M2004.doc)). Karmon et al., Gollub notes, contend that "microbicide introduction should occur only in instances where male condom use is low or, if not, that the likelihood of migration is low." This, she observes, raises the question of whether "women have an unconditional right to microbicides" or whether their access should be based on condom use patterns and the probability of condom migration.

To unravel this question, Gollub examines some roughly analogous public health situations including the provision of a range of contraceptive methods (some of which are more efficacious than others); treatment of people living with HIV in the context of "feared changes in sexual behavior of HIV negative and HIV positive persons"; and the decision to introduce a partially effective HIV vaccine (when one becomes available) rather than exclusively continuing emphasis on condoms and prevention education. In each situation, she explores the actual data and the underlying, often unspoken, assumptions upon which policy decisions are being based in each area. Gollub then considers instances in which "proscriptive/compulsory" public health approaches (compulsory fluoridation of the water, for example) have been adopted versus voluntary approaches that emphasize, "increasing knowledge and understanding with the development of quality counseling". She concludes that, historically, public health goals have been achieved with voluntary approaches – and without incurring the undesirable side effects potentially associated with compulsory approaches such as failure to build a higher level of knowledge and understanding among consumers; generating the public mistrust that arises when information or options are withheld; and exertion of control over developing world circumstances by developed world researchers and policy makers. Gollub contends that "women have an unconditional right to microbicides" as well as to knowledge about their reproductive health and the options available to protect it.

This provocative exchange of views is instructive and well worth reading. We must expect to see this debate escalate as the advent of an effective microbicide draws nearer. It is, therefore, well worth the advocate's time to read both sides of the argument and consider the implications.

## New Report from Engender Health on Microbicide Introduction

Engender Health just released a new report of a qualitative study, "Paving the Path: Preparing for Microbicide Introduction". The study, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development and the John D. Rockefeller Foundation explored a wide range of both positive and negative issues likely to influence the introduction of microbicide use to prevent HIV transmission in South Africa. The study was conducted by EngenderHealth, the University of Cape Town, the Population Council, and the International Partnership for Microbicides, and used

qualitative methods such as focus group discussions and in-depth interviews to gather opinions from respondents at the community, health services, and policy levels about microbicides. The study aims to avoid the barriers and delays that have hindered the introduction of important reproductive health advancements in the past. The PDF version of Paving the Path: Preparing for Microbicide Introduction can be viewed or downloaded at <http://www.engenderhealth.org/res/offc/hiv/microbicides/>.

Overall, respondents at all three levels--community, health services, and policy--expressed support for and interest in microbicides. The most powerful arguments for microbicide included the severe effect of the AIDS pandemic on people's everyday lives, an understanding of women's increased vulnerability to HIV infection, and the desperate need for anything that will help curtail the spread of HIV. Another key result from the study was the important role microbicides will play in providing women with a female-controlled method to prevent HIV infection. Due to the high level of sexual violence in South Africa, respondents also discussed the advantage of having a long-acting microbicide that women could use before leaving the house in case they were raped.

The respondents identified several barriers to microbicide use, such as women's lack of power, the method's partial effectiveness against preventing HIV infection, and the "wetness," or lubrication, produced by using the product. The study suggests the need for further research about the cultural meanings and implications of wetness in other countries. The South African respondents commented that it would be difficult to distinguish whether a woman's wetness was due to her using the microbicide or to having had sex previously with another man, and women were anxious about accusations of infidelity. In addition, many referred to the men's preferences for the vagina to be dry.

## US Support for Increased Global HIV/AIDS Spending on the Rise

At the Global Health Council's annual meeting on June 2, the Kaiser Family Foundation released a new national survey on HIV/AIDS that shows a majority of Americans (56%) now say that the U.S. should spend more to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS in the world, while 9% say the U.S. spends too much. More than half of Americans (55%) now believe that spending more money on HIV/AIDS prevention in Africa and developing countries will lead to meaningful progress - a 15 percentage point increase since 2002. The President and CEO of the Foundation, Drew Altman credited the work of the groups attending the GHC conference with helping to change people's attitudes and noted, "skepticism about prevention, though still real, is now a minority view."

The survey also finds that Americans overwhelmingly (71%) say the media is their top source of information on HIV/AIDS, followed by doctors and other health care professionals at 9%.

The new findings of Americans' views on global HIV/AIDS are part of Kaiser's national "Survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS," conducted in spring 2004. Other portions of the national survey will be released this summer. This portion of the survey explores such issues as foreign aid, general knowledge about the global epidemic and the role of the United States, as well as which individuals are associated with the fight against global HIV/AIDS and where Americans get information about the issue.

Source: Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and Global Health Council. Additional findings from the survey are available at <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/pomr060204pkg.cfm>

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We welcome your input and contributions for future issues! Correspondence can be addressed to [info@global-campaign.org](mailto: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.