



Global Campaign
FOR Microbicides

Global Campaign News – Issue #52 April 20, 2005

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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Global Campaign (GC) Europe Partners Meeting Europe

On April 7-8, European partner groups working on microbicides met in Ferney-Voltaire, France (outside of Geneva) for their first European strategy meeting in two years. Fourteen representatives from Germany, the UK, Spain, Norway, Ireland, the Netherlands met together with Global Campaign staff to discuss the direction GC Europe will take in the coming year and how GC Europe fits into the larger global picture of microbicide advocacy in particular and HIV prevention advocacy generally. Representatives of the International Partnership for Microbicides, the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, Stop AIDS Alliance and the European AIDS Treatment Group were also present to help inform the discussion of how best to collaborate with other pan-European advocates working on these issues.

The European partners expressed great appreciation for the intensive efforts that European Coordinator Rebekah Webb has put into developing GC Europe since accepting the position in 2003 and strategized around fundraising to support additional staffing for the Brussels office. They also shared action plans for activity in their respective countries for the coming year, reviewed new materials available through the Global Campaign and provided input into the report to be made by their three European representatives at the upcoming Global Campaign Steering Committee meeting at the end of May.

U.S. Government report on Nonoxynol-9 North America

The United States General Accountability Office (GAO) released a report last week entitled “Efforts to research and inform the public about Nonoxynol-9 and HIV.” The GAO is the audit, evaluation and investigative arm of Congress and issues reports periodically to “help improve the performance and accountability of the federal government for the American people.”

This report, prepared at the request of four members of the US Congress (Souder, R-IN, Coburn, R-OK, Pitts, R-PA and Weldon, R-FL), describes the federal agencies’ and product manufacturers’ actions to assess the safety and effectiveness of N-9 as a microbicide and the level of information subsequently provided to the public about this topic. The report is posted on the Global Campaign website at <http://www.global-campaign.org/n-9call.htm>

Since the Global Campaign has been following this issue closely, the report provides little new information but it does note that:

1) The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is finalizing its rule to require warning labels on vaginal contraceptives containing N-9 and expects to publish this final rule by September 2005. Testimony submitted by the Global

Campaign when these warning labels were originally proposed in 2003 is available on our website at <http://www.global-campaign.org/n-9call.htm>.

2) The FDA is planning to propose that new warning labels be added to condoms, and will be posting a draft of this proposal for public comment in May 2005.

The latter move is occurring in the context of a larger effort initiated in 2001 by some very conservative members of Congress to pressure the FDA to require condom labeling for “medical accuracy with respect to the overall effectiveness of condoms against STD.” They initiated this effort as part of a campaign to discredit condoms -- although, of course, if the warning language finally approved by the FDA is accurate, it should indicate that condoms are highly effective for disease prevention.

In 2002, WHO wrote, “There is no published scientific evidence that N-9-lubricated condoms provide any additional protection against pregnancy or STIs compared with condoms lubricated with other products. *Since adverse effects due to the addition of N-9 to condoms cannot be excluded*, such condoms should no longer be promoted.” (emphasis added, please see <http://www.global-campaign.org/clientfiles/N9-supportingMemo1.doc>) for more information.

The GAO report notes that both the Centers for Disease Control and the WHO have recommended that, “N-9 condoms not be promoted because there was no published scientific evidence that N-9 lubricated condoms provide any additional protection against STDs compared with other condoms.” Despite these clear recommendations, the U.S. government has no apparent intention of requiring condom manufacturers to discontinue production of condoms coated with N-9.

In 2002, the Global Campaign led a coalition of 85 scientists and health groups to call upon manufacturers of condoms and lubricants to voluntarily remove Nonoxynol-9 from their products. We were successful with all lubricant and condom manufacturers but two: the makers of Trojans and Lifestyles condoms.

Condoms are an essential tool in HIV prevention and should be widely promoted. But adding N-9 to the outside of condoms confers no demonstrable benefit and it does pose a documented risk. As advocates, we need to continue to urge the FDA to reconsider whether simply labeling N-9 coated condom is an adequate way of handling this potential health hazard to consumers. In light of the WHO’s assessment, this issue warrants greater federal consideration than it has received to date.

Request to the G8 for Increased Investment in Microbicides Global

The International Partnership for Microbicides, the Global Campaign for Microbicides, and the Alliance for Microbicide Development are working in partnership to request increased investment in microbicide research and development at this year’s G8 summit. G8 member (Canada, the European Union, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, UK, US) will be meeting in Scotland in July.

In preparation for the summit, in March, the three groups sent letters and a proposal to the heads of state of each G8 member country, requesting that they:

- Significantly increase funding for microbicide research and development, with an emphasis on development, by supporting national research institutions and through public-private partnerships such as the IPM.
- Encourage private pharmaceutical companies to turn over promising candidates that they do not plan to develop to not-for-profit entities such as the International Partnership for Microbicides.
- Promote international leadership by publicly supporting the need for microbicides as part of a comprehensive response to HIV/AIDS, and for the building of capacity in developing countries to conduct large-scale clinical trials of promising candidate microbicides. This should also include assistance for the strengthening of regulatory systems in developing countries and support for the advocacy and policy research that underpins such efforts.
- Ensure that women in developing countries have universal access when a microbicide is successfully developed by creating an advance-purchase commitment for microbicides and establishing such a mechanism within the next 12 months.

We have started to receive responses all of which have been generally supportive. Most notably:

- Sir Michael Jay, leader of the UK's preparations for the G-8 summit wrote "supporting the development of effective prevention technologies, particularly microbicides."
- Mr. Janez Potočnik, Commissioner for Science and Research wrote affirming EC's commitment to research funding for microbicides.
- In the U.S., Ambassador Randall Tobias wrote indicating that the US will make the case for increased investment in HIV/AIDS, including microbicides, using all diplomatic avenues.

The full proposal that was sent to G8 members is available <http://www.global-campaign.org/G8.htm>. We will continue to provide updates on the G8 Summit in future editions of GC News. Finally, basic information about the G8 is available at: <http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/>

Update on the African Microbicides Advocacy Group (AMAG) Africa

The African Microbicides Advocacy Group (AMAG) is over one year old now and has been moving ahead rapidly.

On 12 November 2004, the AMAG eForum was launched. This is a closed email discussion forum for those actively working or engaged in microbicides advocacy and research in Africa. Currently there are 185 members from 24 countries, with 53% working in advocacy, 38% in research and 9% on policy and media. Members share information and discuss current and emerging issues. For example, in February members of the eForum discussed the Tenofovir trials suspended in Nigeria and temporarily in Cameroon.

In November, a number of AMAG members attended the Southern Africa Regional Microbicides Meeting coordinated by Southern African AIDS Trust (SAT). This meeting provided an excellent forum in which AIDS-related NGOs were able to learn more about microbicides and start thinking of, or further developing, their own microbicides advocacy plans. A presentation by AMAG was met by much interest by participants who were eager to join and endorse the network, and also urged AMAG members to accelerate its activities. SAT and AMAG are working closely regarding efforts in Southern Africa.

The highlight of AMAG's efforts in the past year may be the AMAG Strategic Planning meeting held in Durban, 2-4 March 2005. It was an opportunity for the Steering Committee and other selected members to reflect on AMAG's role, structure and path ahead. A report from this meeting will be released to AMAG members soon.

AMAG was also represented at the 2nd Canadian Microbicides Symposium in Ottawa on 12 March 2005. Although this symposium was held primarily to develop action plans for the government, community, and research sectors in Canada, AMAG members were able to voice concerns and raise issues pertaining to microbicides advocacy and research in Africa and encourage that Canadian action plans consider these needs and issues. AMAG members also shared ideas and approaches with MAG-Net, Canada's vibrant network of community microbicides advocacy groups.

Currently, AMAG is conducting an online consultation on the ethics of prevention trials, to feed into the regional and international consultation that UNAIDS is convening. Feedback from African researchers and civil society is imperative as the majority of such prevention trials are taking place in Africa. To ensure that feedback goes beyond the limited participants of regional workshops, the African Planning committee for the consultations and AMAG have teamed up to conduct an email discussion exclusively on the AMAG eForum. Discussion focuses on partnership-building and problem-solving during trials. We hope to gather good feedback and constructive comments to feed into the consultation—the more voices heard, the more experiences acknowledged and more suggestions considered!

For more information about AMAG, or to get involved, contact:

AMAG Coordinator, email: amag_info@yahoo.com

AMAG Webpage: <http://www.global-campaign.org/amag.htm>

Join U.S. advocates for training and lobbying efforts at AIDS Watch Washington DC

More than 400 people have registered for AIDSWatch 2005 from more than 40 states, and thousands more have pledged to convene in Washington to kick off the Campaign to End Aids at the beginning of May.

AIDSWatch, a project of the National Association of People with AIDS (NAPWA-US), is the largest AIDS-related advocacy event in the United States, held each year in Washington, DC. AIDSWatch unites people with HIV/AIDS and their friends and families to tell the U.S. Congress that they should vote for robust federal funding and support for domestic and global AIDS programs.

This year, in addition to visiting Congressional offices, AIDSWatch will provide targeted advocacy and community mobilization skills-building trainings to help advocates gain advanced skills in understanding public policy, HIV/AIDS funding and program issues, and to hone their skills as key educators of elected officials and other community members.

Finally, AIDS activists from across the country will march to the White House on May 5 to kick off the Campaign to End Aids (C2EA). The Campaign defines themselves in their Call for Action:

“We're not an organization, and we're not a one-off event. Rather, we're a national coalition working relentlessly to revitalize the AIDS activist movement in this country. We're the 'AIDS professionals' at the nation's biggest advocacy groups in D.C., and we're shoestring-budget, kitchen-table prevention and treatment advocates in the rural northwest, the deep south, and the heart of our urban centers where AIDS has hit hardest.”

Click here to read their call for action. http://www.hwadvocacy.com/enddaids/downloads/c2ea_call_to_action.pdf

Key dates for upcoming events include:

Sunday, May 1 – NAPWA Fundraiser in Washington, DC
Monday, May 2 – All-day Training for AIDSWatch 2005
Tuesday, May 3 – AIDSWatch Capitol Hill Advocacy Day
Wednesday, May 4 – AIDSWatch Capitol Hill Advocacy Day
Thursday, May 5 – Public Demonstration

Almost all events are free. To get involved, visit the Campaign To End AIDS: www.endaidsnow.org.

Community voices in Nigeria join forces for microbicides and vaccines Africa

Excerpt from an update published on the Nigeria-AIDS eForum by Nnenna Ike, programme officer for NHVMAG

It started off as a sedate discussion, but soon it erupted into lively debate as participants voiced their optimism, fears and aspirations about new, emerging technologies for preventing HIV, especially among women and other vulnerable populations.

“Are you saying the men do not have a say in what their wives use on their bodies?” one participant asked? “It is about time that women are given the opportunity to protect themselves instead of being at the mercy of men who remain unfaithful and careless in this HIV dispensation,” a female participant retorted. Another asked, “If Nigeria cannot even succeed in providing basic amenities like electricity and water, how can we manage such a 'high-tech' venture as HIV vaccines and microbicides?”

These and many more comments were some of the questions and debates provoked at the community mobilization training workshop on new HIV prevention technologies, which was held in Lagos two weeks ago. Organized by Nigeria HIV Vaccine and Microbicide advocacy Group (NHVMAG), the training was held in the serene environment of the WDC Lodge, in Agege, a Lagos suburb.

Many of the participants - numbering forty-two - came from different states within southern Nigeria. The training is the first in a series to be organized by NHVMAG, with funding support from the British government's Department for International Development (DFID).

The workshop focused on the need for HIV vaccine and microbicide advocacy among NGOs and their host communities and the researchers. Participants were also taught to develop effective skills for promoting advocacy efforts while taking cognizance of their peculiar community, religious and cultural needs. Besides this, the training provided an opportunity for interactions and enlightenment among members of the different stakeholder communities - researchers, PLWH, advocates, the media and NGOs.

While delivering her presentation titled, "Why do we need new prevention technologies for HIV?" NHVMAG coordinator, Dr. Morenike Ukpong said there was an urgent need to devise new technologies that would help reduce the rate of HIV infection. This is because a number of people are not able to use condoms and the ABC of HIV prevention is not being strictly observed. These new technologies may produce products such as microbicides (that can prevent women from getting infected) and vaccines - which may not be readily acceptable by the community if the researchers do not involve them from the concept design stage till product-finish. This is the reason for the workshop, she added.

Ms. Funmi Doherty, who heads NHVMAG's community mobilization team, added that community advocates need to partner with researchers, support ethical research and ensure that the community will accept and afford the new prevention products when available. She also explained the important benefits of early engagement by civil society groups with government agencies and scientists in mobilizing public awareness and preparedness for these new prevention methods.

The clinical trial site co-coordinators of on-going microbicide trials at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital and the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital represented the research community. They engaged the participants in discussions on the implications of human trials of a product, the difficulties of achieving informed consent from local people and the problems of adherence. They were enjoined to relay to other Nigerian researchers the importance of community preparedness and involvement in their research studies for successful outcomes. Researchers were also encouraged to make their findings available to the media so that a wider circle of people would know what they are doing and thus ensure transparency and sincerity.

NHVMAG is a civil society group formed in June 2003 to advance community mobilisation and policy intervention and action for HIV vaccine and microbicides research and development in Nigeria. As part of its public communication and community mobilization strategies, it plans to hold a similar workshop for NGOs and community groups in the northern part of Nigeria. Consultations meetings and training programmes with the research community on standard of care and ethical issues in research in new HIV prevention technologies are also being planned. For more information, contact Nnenna Ike, Programme Officer, NHVMAG, info@nhvmag.org

INFO Project report on Microbicides available on-line Global

The INFO Project released a new report on microbicides earlier this year entitled, "Microbicides: New Potential for Protection." The report gives a good introduction to the five microbicides in final stages of testing, how microbicides would join condoms in saving lives, and why ensuring access is essential and is available at: <http://www.inforhealth.org/inforeports/microbicides/index.shtml>

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