



Global Campaign
FOR Microbicides

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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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UK awards £26m for phase 3 trial of Pro-2000

Global

Following sustained campaigning by the UK Campaign for Microbicides, microbicide activists, the general public and the International Partnership for Microbicides, the British government has announced a total of £26 million in funding for a Phase 3 trial of Pro-2000. The landmark decision gives the Microbicides Development Programme (MDP) the unique distinction of becoming the first of the five Phase 3 trials currently enrolling to be funded to completion.

The UK's Medical Research Council (MRC) and the MDP will conduct the trial, in conjunction with Imperial College London's Clinical trials centre. The study is expected to begin by September 2005 and run for 3 years. Two concentrations of the Pro-2000 gel will be tested by 12,000 women in Uganda, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia.

With this funding, the UK government once again sets a powerful precedent for other European governments. "AIDS is the biggest killer in Africa," said Department for International Development (DFID) Secretary Hilary Benn in his statement about the funding announcement. "Most new HIV infections occur among young African women. Women vulnerable to infection are frequently unable to refuse sex or to insist on the use of a condom. The £26m announced today will fund a final stage trial of a microbicide gel that, if effective, could help women to protect themselves against HIV infection and help reverse the spread of the disease globally."

The UK has been a pioneer in the field of microbicide research, assessment work and advocacy. Since 1999, DFID has provided £18 million for research and development. This includes the existing five-year grant of £16 million to the MDP; support to the International Partnership for Microbicides (IPM) to accelerate discovery, development and accessibility; funding for International Family Health (now via the Global Campaign for Microbicides) and to the Population Council to enable policy dialogue and action for microbicides development and access. While the majority of the final stage field trial funding comes from DFID, £2 million has been contributed by the MRC.

Professor Janet Darbyshire, Director of the MRC's Clinical Trials Unit, called the decision "fantastic news. The funding will take us one step further towards identifying an effective microbicide – a crucial element of our effort to reduce HIV transmission." For more information on the MDP program see www.mdp.mrc.ac.uk

National Conference in India features microbicides advocates and researchers Asia

From 16-17 April, more than 300 delegates in Jaipur from all over India gathered for a National Conference on Inter-State Networking of State AIDS Societies (INSAFCON-2005) organized by Rajasthan State AIDS Control Society.

Dr Smita Joshi, Research Officer at the National AIDS Research Institute, spoke on “Recent Developments in the field of Microbicides”. She informed the group about the need for female-controlled options and the products that are in completed, ongoing and planned trials both in India and around the world.

Bobby Ramakant, a long-time microbicide advocate, delivered a talk on “Ethical issues in conducting clinical trials on microbicides.” He raised issues including informed consent, risks and benefits of participation to study participants and the community, care of participants who sero-convert and those who test positive at screening, and reimbursement of trial participants.

Following the session on microbicides, one local NGO participant from Bharatpur, Jagrupani Devi, expressed her enthusiasm for microbicides and other female controlled prevention options. She is convinced that they will serve the needs of thousands of women are currently exposing themselves to risks because their partners choose not to use a male condom.

Amit Dwivedi, an HIV/AIDS coordinator for the Abhinav Bharat Foundation (ABF) added that there are thousands of women in Rajasthan who are not empowered enough to abstain from sex and who are abused very early in their lives and suffer continued abuse and exploitation. Many of these women, like sex workers, are also not in a position to be faithful to one partner. The use of the male condom, more often than not, is the prerogative of men. In these circumstances Amit finds microbicides and other prevention options women can control the use of, a very positive development on the prevention horizon of HIV control.

The opportunity to discuss both scientific progress and ethical dimensions of microbicides with a broad audience is further evidence of the growing interest in and commitment to microbicides in India. The Global Campaign congratulates Dr. Joshi and Bobby Ramakant for their contributions to the dialogue among Indian policy-makers, scientists and communities.

Today Sponge to be marketed again in the U.S. North America

On April 22, Allendale Pharmaceuticals, the manufacturer of a non-prescription contraceptive called the Today Sponge, received FDA approval to re-market the sponge in the United States. The Today Sponge prevents pregnancy by covering the cervix and releasing spermicide from inside the soft, concave device.

The product has been off the market in the US for more than a decade due to manufacturing problems but has been available in Canada and via the Internet since March 2003. By late summer, it is expected to be on the shelves of retail drug stores in the US, as well as discount stores such as Wal-Mart.

The Today Sponge is a polyurethane device that acts as both a barrier method (the foam is designed to trap and absorb semen before sperm can enter the cervix) and as a delivery method for Nonoxynol-9 (N-9), a common spermicide. Although it contains 1,000 mg N-9, the manufacturer states that the Sponge actually releases only about 3-5 mg per hour of wear time – or approximately 125 mg. total over the course of use. This figure was established by measuring the amount of N-9 remaining in the sponge after 48 hours of wear by women who engaged in intercourse during use. By comparison, most N-9 gels and creams sold for use with diaphragms deliver 100 mg to 150 mg of N-9 into the vagina.

Allendale Pharmaceuticals has included language on the Today Sponge label specifying that it is for vaginal use only and that the “product does not protect against the AIDS virus (HIV) or other STDs”.

As the World Health Organization advised in 2001, N-9 contraceptive products do offer an important option for women who chose not to use hormonal birth control methods. But, since N-9 may also increase a woman's chances of getting infected if she is exposed to HIV, those at risk of HIV, especially those having sex more than once a day, shouldn't use N-9 for birth control.

Welcome to Shannon Cali – newest member of the Global Campaign staff North America

Please join us in welcoming Shannon Cali, the newest member of the Global Campaign's Washington D.C. secretariat. Shannon, who joined us in mid-April, will be our financial and administrative manager. In this capacity, she will be managing and monitoring the Global Campaign's administrative, contractual, and financial activities including liaising with donors, consultants and contractors on all financial matters. Shannon joins the Global Campaign with a background in vaccine research and HIV/AIDS pharmaceutical sales. Shannon served for two years as a Peace Corps volunteer in Malawi and holds Masters degrees in Public Health and Business Administration from Johns Hopkins University. She can be reached at scali@path-dc.org

U.S. legislative advocacy moving forward with Senate support North America

As reported in GC News #50, the Microbicide Development Act was introduced in the U.S. Senate on March 8, International Women's Day. The Act is written to strengthen and accelerate microbicide research and development at the National Institutes of Health, the US Agency for International Development, and the Centers for Disease Control.

As of May 9, an unprecedented 19 senators (almost one-fifth of the entire Senate) have already co-sponsored the Bill! A similar Bill will be introduced in the House of Representatives later this summer.

We are now calling on U.S. advocates to help increase this level of support by writing, emailing, calling, or visiting your Senators! The Global Campaign legislative advocacy webpage has all of the information you would need including:

- sample letter to congress
- factsheet for legislators (that includes key talking points)
- factsheet for advocates that explain the act and how to get in touch with your legislators
- complete language from the bill

Please take action now to get your senators on board! <http://www.global-campaign.org/legislativeadvocacy.htm>

Media Highlight: Debating CNN vs. ABC Media-Global

In the March edition of *International Family Planning Perspectives*, Steve Sinding, the director general of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, writes a short and well-thought out article about the issues surrounding debates of "ABC" (abstinence, being faithful, condom use) versus "CNN" (condoms, needles, negotiation).

Sinding acknowledges that the basic premise of ABC is both epidemiologically and programmatically sound, but then recognizes that for a number of reasons, HIV prevention is not that simple. He goes on to write about marriage as a risk factor, condom stigma, needle exchange, and the evidence about condoms. He also insists that science, and not ideology, should govern how decisions are made in our response to the HIV pandemic. He concludes the article with the following:

"Instead of debating CNN vs. ABC, we must recognize the complexity of sexual relations, which embrace every facet of our lives, including issues of culture, tradition, power and status. We must acknowledge the unequal power relationships between men and women, especially older men and younger women, and we must design interventions that provide realistic choices. Above all, we must resist efforts to impose a particular morality on individuals. We must respect the individual and find ways of giving people realistic and effective options. We must not deny men

and women access to information or technologies that enable them to protect their health and even their lives. Forty years of experience in family planning and reproductive health has shown us that empowering individuals to make informed choices is the only approach that really works.”

The complete article is available at the Alan Guttmacher Institute’s *International Family Planning Perspectives* website: <http://www.agi-usa.org/pubs/journals/3103805.html>

Media Highlight: Special issue of the Indian Journal of Medical Research

Media - Asia

The April 2005 edition of *Indian Journal of Medical Research* (IJMR) is published as a special issue on HIV/AIDS. All the articles are available in pdf format from the IJMR web page, accessible at the following url.

<http://www.icmr.nic.in/ijmr/ijmr.htm>. Of particular interest:

- *Preparing for efficacy trials of vaginal microbicides in Indian women*, by Smita Joshi, Suniti Solomon, Kenneth Mayer and Sanjay Mehendale.
- *HIV/AIDS epidemic in India: risk factors, risk behavior and strategies for prevention and control*, by Sheela Godbole and Sanjay Mehendale
- *Ethical Issues in HIV/AIDS research*, by Vasantha Muthuswamy

Congratulations to our colleagues in India for their contributions to the literature!

Media Highlight: The Ban that Kills

Media-Global

In the latest edition of *Conscience*, a quarterly journal published by Catholics for a Free Choice, three researchers from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine have authored an excellent article entitled, “The Ban That Kills: The Vatican’s allegations about condoms deny scientific fact and cost some people their lives.” Anna Foss, Peter Vickerman, and Charlotte Watts write: “The most recent statistics on the spread of HIV/AIDS make it more urgent than ever for the institutional [Catholic] church to reconsider its stance on condoms. While there are some positive signs of movement beyond the walls of the Vatican, a recent paper by Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo (president of the Pontifical Council for the family) has shown that the Vatican remains intransigent and insular on this subject.”

The authors provide basic data on the HIV/aids pandemic and the effectiveness of condoms, and then explain how Cardinal Trujillo and others have been selectively interpreting these data.

The authors continue to state: “Polls consistently show that most Catholics disagree with the hierarchy’s ban on condoms. Yet the same hierarchy that controls 100,000 hospitals and 200,000 other social service agencies worldwide ban both education about and the provision of condoms in their institutions. This attitude towards condoms is in sad contrast to the important contribution the church makes to the provision of AIDS care. Catholic organizations provide some 25% of AIDS care worldwide, making the Catholic church the largest institution in the world providing direct AIDS care.”

Finally, the authors highlight the Condoms4Life campaign’s Good Shepherd Awards to Catholic bishops for their positions on condom use to prevent the spread of HIV. Launched on World AIDS Day 2001, the Condoms4life campaign (www.condoms4life.org) is a worldwide public education effort to raise awareness about the devastating effect of the bishops’ ban on condoms.

Although this article does not appear on in its entirety, other excerpts from the current issue of *Conscience* are available at: <http://www.catholicsforchoice.org/conscience/consciencecurrent.htm>.

We welcome your input and contributions for future issues! Please send emails to: info@global-campaign.org.

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