



## Global Campaign News – Issue #71 11 October 2006

Welcome to the *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 STIs. This and previous issues of *GC News* are available online at <http://www.global-campaign.org/gcarchives.htm>

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## **Trials Watch**

### **Microbicide trials expose alarming levels of HIV prevalence in women Africa**

Researchers conducting Phase 3 trials of first generation microbicides have found HIV prevalence rates in women as high as 66% in some settings in South Africa, confirming “worrying upward trends” in women’s vulnerability to infection in the region. The country has the largest population of people living with HIV in the world.

As reported in [IRIN PlusNews](#) on 19<sup>th</sup> September, the findings were made by the HIV Prevention Research Unit at the Medical Research Council, headed by Prof. Gita Ramjee. The Unit currently conducts clinical trials of four of the five leading candidates (Carraguard, Cellulose Sulphate, PRO 2000 and Buffergel) in eight test sites across South Africa. Prevalence rates of between 38-50% were found in KwaZulu-Natal while in the Embo area south of Durban the prevalence was found to be more than 66%.

Participants in the trials are offered CD4 testing and referred to hospitals for treatment of opportunistic infections and ARV management when necessary. Trial sites are able to refer volunteers who screen out of trials to PEPFAR care clinics, while women who sero-convert during the trial are given the option to enroll in the SPARTAC trial to assess effectiveness of a short course of ARV therapy (for more information see the MRC ‘iThemba’ newsletter, July 2006 - <http://www.mrc.ac.za/publications/publications.htm>).

Since only women are enrolled and tested, it is not clear if similar prevalence rates are occurring among men. “The study might be considered somewhat biased as only women were tested” said Ramjee in an interview with PlusNews. She explained that further research would attempt to address this bias by testing both sexes. According to UNAIDS, young women in South Africa aged 15-24 are three to six times more likely to be infected with HIV than young men.

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## Advocacy in Action

### Gender AIDS Forum makes progress in South Africa Africa

Since 1998, Gender AIDS Forum (GAF), a Durban-based South African NGO, has been involved in educating communities and mobilising a response to microbicides as an integral part of a broader sexual and reproductive rights agenda. Specifically, GAF is campaigning to support efforts at researching a microbicide which is developed in a way that ensures that the rights of women who participate in these trials are upheld and that a safe and affordable microbicide is developed as soon as possible. Furthermore, they want to get government commitment now to ensure the roll out of a product immediately once it is available.

The current National AIDS Plan for South Africa (2000 - 2005) whilst addressing the importance of vaccine research and development does not identify microbicides and women controlled barrier methods as a critical component. In the current plan 15 goals are articulated, hence they refer to the microbicide advocacy work they do as Goal 16, the missing goal. As the country develops a National AIDS Plan for South Africa (2006 - 2010), the Gender AIDS Forum and it's partner organisations intensified efforts to ensure that our government includes microbicides in the National AIDS Plan.

Through a series of activities and events, GAF consulted with about 500 women and men and developed an advocacy agenda for women's and youth rights within the National AIDS Plan for South Africa (2006 – 2010). This agenda became the basis for the *Critical Elements to Save Women's Lives*, a 8 point set of claims and demands that will enable effective HIV and AIDS responses in South Africa from a women's, sexual and reproductive health rights perspective – including a clause on microbicides. The clause as part of the Critical Elements has been endorsed by over 500 organisations in South Africa along with the Goal 16 petition which calls for accelerated microbicides research and development

In March 2006, GAF hosted a breakfast, bringing together high profile women, where the Deputy Minister of Health, Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge pronounced the Critical Elements as “not unreasonable” and committed to advancing these within the process of drafting the new National AIDS Plan. The participants, who hailed from media, human and gender rights organizations, policy making, community activists and the arts, engaged in a presentation by social scientist Quarraisha Abdool Karim, made commitments to the Critical Elements, and signed the GOAL 16 petition. The breakfast received radio and print media coverage, increased the profile of GAF and of microbicides and also has helped to strengthen the relationship between the Ministry of Health and GAF.

In addition to the Goal 16 efforts, GAF has also hosted an MTV (microbicides, treatment and vaccine) dialogue in South Africa contributed to the debates internationally, developed and distributed an activist package, facilitated a dialogue amongst researchers and advocates around Nonoxynol 9, and trained microbicides facilitators, trainers, and advocates. For more information about GAF's work, visit their website: <http://www.gaf.org.za/>

### Medical student training on microbicides North America

On 23-25 September, 12 motivated medical students (several pictured here) from across the U.S. spent three days at the first ever Microbicides Leadership Institute. The Institute, sponsored and organized by the American Medical Students Association's (AMSA) AIDS Advocacy Network (AAN) and the Global Campaign for Microbicides, provided skills building opportunities on both the intricacies of the microbicides field and basic advocacy.

Founded in 1950, AMSA is a student-governed, non-profit organization committed to representing the concerns of physicians-in-training. With over 68,000 members, including medical and premedical students, residents and practicing physicians, AMSA is committed to improving medical training as well as advancing the profession of medicine. AMSA's AIDS Advocacy Network brings together



students interested in ending the scourge of HIV/AIDS and provides them with the tools to educate, advocate and become active around issues pertaining to HIV/AIDS.

The first day was spent learning about microbicides – including presentations from Chris Curry and Bindiya Patel on the basics of microbicides, Dr. Tom Moench of Reprotect on the science of microbicides, and Anna Forbes on the ethics of clinical trials. The second day included skillsbuilding workshops to learn practical advocacy techniques including how to write articles for journals and mass media, how to plan events, how to conduct legislative visits, how to present on microbicides. Finally on Monday, the students went to Capitol Hill to meet with Congressional staffers about the Microbicide Development Act.

In participating in the leadership institute, students all make commitments to:

- Present on microbicides at their schools and within their communities
- Organize one lobby day or direct action event related to microbicides in their regions
- Attend and present at AMSA regional or national conferences

The members of the leadership institute also created the AMSA/GCM Microbicides Advocacy Task Force, and members have already submitted an article to an AMSA journal within a week of the training. We look forward to continuing our partnership with AMSA, and involving more students into the microbicides field.

## **Cleveland chapter hosts exhibit at University Hospitals North America**

On Friday, September 29, the AIDS Taskforce featured Cleveland’s involvement in microbicide development in a co-sponsored event with University Hospitals. Local physicians and researchers, city officials, and medical students attended the reception for the Global Campaign for Microbicide’s exhibit entitled, “Giving Women Power Over AIDS.” The exhibit features the story and photo essay, “In Her Mother’s Shoes,” which focuses on how women and children are affected by HIV/AIDS.

Executive Director Earl Pike began the reception by introducing the key players in microbicide research in Cleveland. Michael Lederman, MD and Director of the Center for AIDS Research (CFAR) at University Hospitals, spoke about the scientific breakthroughs of microbicides. Matt Carroll, Director of the Cleveland Department of Public Health, addressed the audience about Cleveland’s role in the accessibility of health care for those living with HIV/AIDS. As the Associate Professor of Anthropology at Case Reserve University, Dr. Janet McGrath discussed the cultural implications for microbicides. Next, local HIV/AIDS advocate Naimah O’Neil talked about how



different her life might have been if microbicides were available. And lastly, second-year medical student Matifadza “Mati” Hlatshwayo brought a global perspective to microbicide development by telling her own story of growing up in Zimbabwe.

The formal opening of the exhibition concluded in the University Hospitals Atrium (pictured here). Everyone gathered upstairs to walk through the moving exhibit. AIDS Taskforce staff members were on hand to answer questions about microbicides. In total, the exhibit remained in Cleveland almost two months, traveling also to Great Lakes Science Center and Cuyahoga Community College.

## **Position available with the Global Campaign North America**

The Policy and Ethics Officer will guide, manage, and help implement the Global Campaign’s work related to ethics and policy advocacy. The incumbent will have lead responsibility for a number of on-going projects and will work with the Director to develop the Campaign’s next three-year strategic plan in the areas of ethics, access and policy

advocacy. The job involves project management, research and writing, and the ability to conceptualize and orchestrate processes of consensus building. Link to job description: <http://www.path.org/job.php?id=1984>

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## ***New Resources***

### **Newsletter from the Cervical Barrier Advancement Society**

Several times a year, the Cervical Barrier Advancement Society distributes a newsletter that is designed to keep subscribers abreast of new research, activities in the field, and relevant events. View the October 2006 edition at <http://www.cervicalbarriers.org/newsletter/>. If you have input on the content of the newsletter or have an item of interest to include, contact them at [info@cervicalbarriers.org](mailto:info@cervicalbarriers.org). The Cervical Barrier Advancement Society (CBAS) aims to raise the profile of cervical barrier methods both for preventing pregnancy and potentially HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

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## ***In Memoriam:***

### **In Memory of Omololu Falobi, Nigerian Activist, Journalist, Father and Organizer Africa**

On October 5, Nigerian AIDS activist and journalist Omololu Falobi was killed during an armed robbery while returning home after a speaking engagement. His death is an enormous loss to all of us engaged in the fight against HIV/AIDS. He was instrumental in the development of the HIV/AIDS movement in Africa as the founder of *Journalists Against AIDS (JAAIDS) Nigeria*, the award-winning, media-based, non-governmental HIV/AIDS advocacy organization. He was also instrumental in the founding of NHVMAG, the Nigerian HIV Vaccines and Microbicides Advocacy Group.

With a Masters degree in Political Science, Omololu founded Journalists Against Aids (JAAIDS) in 1997 to increase and improve national coverage of HIV/AIDS by working directly with journalists to better their training and access to information.

He led JAAIDS until his death, growing the organization's capacity and his own workload in the process. Last year, Omololu described himself in an interview as spending most of his time on policy advocacy because the political environment was limiting JAAIDS ability to realize its mission; "to contribute to the prevention, care and control of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria by providing innovative communication interventions that will facilitate positive behavior change to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS."

With a group of committed advocates and scientists, he helped establish Nigeria HIV Vaccine and Microbicides Advocacy Group (NHVMAG) in 2003 to mobilize civil society support for new HIV prevention technologies and to ensure the proactive participation Nigerians in global efforts for the development of HIV vaccine and microbicides. NHVMAG is a popularly-owned campaign, implementing an agenda created by its members, supporters and partners. Omololu and Dr. Morenike Upkong were co-coordinators of NHVMAG at the time of his death. Omololu was an Ashoka fellow and recipient of the IAS Young Investigator's Award and the Highway Africa Award for Innovative Use of New Media. Between January 2003 and December 2005, he served as the African NGO Representative on the Programme Coordinating Board of UNAIDS. He recently helped to convene the African Civil Society Coalition on HIV and AIDS, which serves as the main umbrella platform for regional and global HIV/AIDS advocacy for African civil society organizations.

His enormous contributions are best reflected, however, by the high esteem in which he was held by his friends and colleagues. According to Manju Chatani of the African Microbicides Advocacy group (AMAG), Omololu "was a true African son, devoted to ensuring that African voices are at the forefront of HIV response."

Dr. Ukpong noted that Omololu, "addressed stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS boldly and fearlessly. He gave all he had to addressing HIV/AIDS and ensuring that all was mobilised to make things well for Nigerians."

Lori Heise, Director of the Global Campaign for Microbicides observed, “We will all miss Omololu’s vision and limitless energy. It is indeed a sad day for AIDS activism. May his spirit live on through our collective efforts.”

The Global Campaign joins in expressing profound gratitude for Omololu’s life and work and in sending our deepest condolences to his wife and children, his family, his colleagues at JAAIDS and his comrades at NHVMAG and worldwide.

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