



Global Campaign News – Issue #101

Welcome to the 101st issue of *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 other sexually transmitted infections. This and previous issues of *GC News* are available online at <http://www.global-campaign.org/gcarchives.htm>

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Study of HIV-resistant women in Kenya may yield new candidate microbicides

Africa

It has long been known that a small number of at-risk individuals remain uninfected even after years of repeated exposure to HIV. Researchers studying one group of such highly-exposed individuals (140 HIV-negative women enrolled in a study of commercial sex workers in Nairobi, Kenya) have identified some proteins that may help explain why these women have remained uninfected for so many years.

By comparing the types and quantities of different proteins in vaginal fluid collected from HIV-negative and HIV-positive women enrolled in the study, a team of scientists at the University of Nairobi and University of Manitoba have identified a set of 15 proteins that occur more frequently and in greater amounts in HIV-negative women. These 15 proteins may help scientists identify markers of natural immunity to HIV.

It is also possible that these same proteins might help researchers develop additional candidate microbicides. Pauline Irungu, East Africa coordinator for the Global Campaign for Microbicides, told a reporter from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "It is a little too early to say if this particular study will lead to development of new candidate microbicides, [but] these sorts of advances yield a better understanding of the biological and socioeconomic factors that influence transmission of HIV and other sexually-transmitted infections. It is this type of basic research that will help us develop new tools to stop the spread of HIV."

For more information about this study, visit <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=80228>

CONRAD receives five-year, \$100 million grant from USAID

North America

Earlier this month, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) announced that it was awarding CONRAD US\$100 million over the next five years to continue its efforts to develop and test new candidate microbicides to prevent HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

CONRAD, a collaborative reproductive health program based at the Eastern Virginia Medical School in Norfolk, VA, has been actively involved in developing and testing contraceptives and candidate microbicides for over twenty years.

The USAID award will be used to support CONRAD's continued efforts to develop safe and effective microbicides to help women and men protect themselves against HIV and other STIs, including the creation of novel candidate microbicides, clinical testing of such current candidate products such as tenofovir gel and UC781, and development of new laboratory tests of microbicide safety and effectiveness.

For more information about CONRAD and its ongoing efforts to develop and test candidate microbicides, visit their website at <http://www.conrad.org>

Microbicide product developer gives license to Durex to sell condoms coated with their product in case it proves effective

Australia

On September 9, Starpharma (a microbicide developer based in Australia) announced that it had signed a licensing agreement giving SSL International, the owner of the Durex condom brand, the rights to sell VivaGel® (their lead candidate microbicide), coated condoms in most countries throughout the world.

This announcement raised immediate questions with the Global Campaign and other advocates who have vigorously opposed the continued sale of condoms coated with Nonoxonyl-9, on the grounds that the N-9 may actually increase HIV risk when these condoms are used for anal sex (for more information, see <http://www.global-campaign.org/n-9call.htm>).

GCM spear-headed the "Call to Discontinue N-9 for Rectal Use" in 2002, inspiring virtually all the major lubricant manufacturers and several condom manufacturers to stop adding N-9 to their products. SSL, notably, was the only one of the three largest condom manufacturers to discontinue its sale of N-9-coated condoms. Unfortunately, the other two—Ansell Ltd., maker of Lifestyles condoms and Church & Dwight Company, maker of Trojan—have resisted, arguing that N-9 on condoms provides women with back-up protection against pregnancy in case of condom failure (an hypothesis that has never been proven).

On learning that SSL had secured the license to add VivaGel to its condoms, we immediately wrote to our contacts there and asked about the time-frame for production of these coated condoms and how they planned to assure that they would be safe for rectal, as well as vaginal, use. They responded promptly with a letter noting that, "execution of the latest agreement with Starpharma does not result in or signify that VivaGel will be immediately marketed and we would like to offer the assurance that all aspects of safety of the condom coating product will be considered with Starpharma and the regulatory authorities prior to the product being approved by the regulators and marketed".

We have shared this news with our colleagues at International Rectal Microbicides Advocates (IRMA). GCM and IRMA jointly corresponded with StarPharma about this issue last year, when they first announced the intention to produce a condom coating. Starpharma responded by pointing out that they are pursuing parallel development programs to test VivaGel's efficacy both as a microbicide and as a topical contraceptive. It could be used as a condom coating if it demonstrated effectiveness in either area (although, of course, the labeling will have to clearly indicate the category in which it has been proven to work).

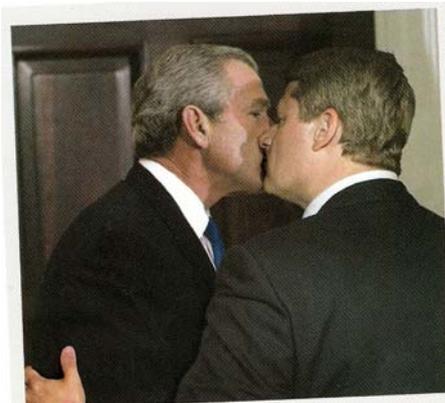
Starpharma also assured us that "rectal safety studies are an important part of the development program for a microbicide, whether or not the rectal route of administration is the intended route. A copy of this letter is available on line at

<http://www.rectalmicrobicides.org/docs/SPL%20to%20IRMWG%20and%20GCM.pdf>)

Starpharma raises its operating capital from investors and government agencies, including the United States National Institutes of Health.

Advocacy in Action

North America



(Canadian Prime minister Stephen Harper and U.S president George Bush)

With Federal elections coming up in the next few weeks in Canada (October 14th) and the US (November 4th), advocates in both countries are highlighting HIV prevention, including microbicides, as an election issue.

Canada

The Canadian AIDS Society, a GCM partner which convenes the national Microbicides Advocacy Group Network (MAG-Net), has developed a web page for the elections, calling on voters to raise a number of HIV-related issues with their candidates, including funding and a range of social

justice issues. On new prevention technologies, voters are encouraged to ask questions such as the following:

“Canada is the only country in the world to have both a national Microbicides Action Plan and a Canadian HIV Vaccines Plan. Both Plans have been created with participation of all sectors of society: government, industry, research and community. Given that microbicides, when available, would be an effective, user initiated, easy to use protection against HIV, will you and your party support the increase of funding allocated to microbicide research and community engagement?”

For more information, visit www.cdnaids.ca/election2008 for a wealth of tools and resources.

United States

The Campaign to End AIDS (C2EA), a coalition of HIV positive individuals, advocates and organizations, has been working to spread the message that the next US president needs to make the creation of a National AIDS Strategy a priority. GCM advocates have been encouraged to participate in this “Stand Against AIDS” action, and to lend their voices to the movement to create a National AIDS strategy.

Advocates recommend that a National AIDS Strategy should include the following elements:

- Improvement in prevention and treatment outcomes through reliance on evidence-based programming.
- Identification of clear priorities for action across federal agencies and assignment of responsibilities and timelines for follow-through.
- Inclusion, as a primary focus, of prevention and treatment needs of African Americans, other communities of color, gay men of all races, and other groups at elevated risk.
- Efforts to address social factors that increase vulnerability to infection.
- Promotion of a strengthened HIV prevention and treatment research effort.

For more information about the National AIDS Strategy please visit <http://www.nationalaidsstrategy.org/>.

U.S Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) HIV Incidence Hearing

North America

On September 16th, Chairman Henry Waxman (Democrat from California) of the House of Representatives Oversight and Government Reform Committee held a hearing to address the updated Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) U.S. domestic HIV incidence numbers, released in August 2008. Due to more sophisticated tracking and testing methods, the CDC estimated that there are approximately 56,300 new HIV infections occurring in the U.S. each year, as opposed to the previously cited 40,000. However, the CDC emphasized that this increase from 40,000 to 56,300 new cases didn't mean that the number of infections in the US were increasing, but simply that they have been remaining steady at a higher rate than previously estimated.

In response to a call for input into the September 16th hearing, The Global Campaign for Microbicides submitted questions and testimony to the Committee highlighting the fact that women of colour are disproportionately affected by HIV, and that new tools are needed to allow them to protect themselves. In the U.S black women are 23 times more likely to be diagnosed with HIV than white women. The submitted questions focused on the need for increased funding and support for the research and development of new HIV prevention technologies, specifically microbicides.

Microbicides were brought to the forefront of the HIV prevention conversation at the hearing. Two of the witnesses, Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, National Institutes of Health and Dr. Julie Gerberding, Director of the CDC, mentioned

microbicides as an important part of the HIV prevention agenda, and vocalized their support for ongoing research and development.

Search for Success in South Africa

Africa

Salim Abdool Karim writes in the South African Mail and Guardian about HIV in the South African context. In an environment where one in three pregnant women test positive for HIV, new prevention tools, such as vaccines and microbicides, are desperately needed. The article contextualizes the development of these technologies by recognizing the unique nature of the virus, our lack of understanding of it and how the recent trials of vaccines and microbicides have increased our understanding of HIV and how it interacts with our immune system.

Like many recent articles about the progress of new prevention technologies, Karim's insights place the search for user-initiated technologies against the backdrop of the trials that have recently taken place. However, as well as explaining trials themselves and the laboratory and animal research that takes place before them (in lay terms), he also provides clarity on why it is important that these trials are not viewed as failures but as simple steps in the long-term scientific endeavour of finding a microbicides or vaccine.

For an accurate and comprehensible summary of the importance of putting the results of recent flat trials in context, find the article at: <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2008-09-16-search-for-success>

AIDS Activists Celebrate New Health Minister in South Africa

Africa

Following a tumultuous week in South Africa where President Mbeki was recalled by his party, the African National Congress, and forced to resign, good news emerged on the health front. Within hours of taking office on Thursday, September 25, the newly appointed President Kgalema Motlanthe, announced that the notorious Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang would be removed and replaced with newly-appointed Barbara Hogan. Dr. Molefi Sefularo was appointed as the new Deputy Minister of Health.

South Africa's Treatment Action Campaign, the leading HIV activist group in the country, released a statement welcoming these appointments while citing the sober statistic that over two million South Africans have died of AIDS during the presidency of Thabo Mbeki. Mbeki with the help of Manto, "pursued a policy of politically supported AIDS denialism and undermined the scientific governance of medicine."

Hogan's appointment marks the dawn of a new day for all those fighting AIDS and promoting the right to health in South Africa. As a long-time anti-apartheid and human rights activist, Hogan was the first, and one of only two white women, to be convicted of treason in South Africa during the apartheid years and spent a decade in prison. She became a member of Parliament in 1994, and was one of the few to speak out against Mbeki's AIDS denialist stance and support the efforts of AIDS activists in South Africa.

GCM welcomes her appointment.

Highlighted Resources

UNIFEM and the ATHENA Network have launched the results of a review of women's leadership and participation in the AIDS Response.

Global

'My dear sisters, where policies are being made, our faces are not at those tables' declared Charity Ngilu, Kenyan Minister of Health at the 2007 International Women's Summit. Ensuring that women are properly represented and are able to fully participate in policy-making on the global AIDS response has long been a struggle. More importantly finding information about who, where and when women are present at negotiation tables is a laborious process and can take up huge amounts of resources itself. For this reason UNIFEM and the ATHENA network have put together a comprehensive review of women's leadership and participation in the AIDS response.

Launched during the Mexico City International AIDS conference earlier this year, the report brings to light the stark difference between the numbers of women working as community-based care-givers and with women's rights groups and the pitiful number of women permanently represented on country coordinating boards for the Global Fund to fight AIDS tuberculosis and Malaria and on National AIDS councils.

The review also recognises the challenges to women who are able to represent on National AIDS councils and on other such bodies. The inequitable position of women in society and socio-economic structures in which we live and work are highlighted as major barriers in achieving true participation. It allows for the first time, for women's true experience of participation in HIV responses to be brought to light and critically examined.

To download a 4 page summary or the full report, go to:
http://www.unifem.org/news_events/story_detail.php?StoryID=708

Country Report Cards on HIV prevention for young women and girls

Global

The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS (GCWA), International Planned Parenthood Federation, together with UNFPA and Young Positives, are developing country Report Cards to strengthen HIV prevention responses for girls and young women. By the end of 2008, there will be 25 country cards for Cambodia, Cameroon, China, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Malawi, Morocco, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Russia, Rwanda, Serbia, Swaziland, Thailand and Uganda. Many of the cards are translated into local languages for use by local advocates and stakeholders.

Each Report Card provides a country profile, information on HIV prevention from the legal, policy, service availability and accessibility, rights and participation perspectives and includes quotes and issues raised by young women and girls of the country. They discuss key social and cultural issues. These form the basis for a series of recommendations aimed at increasing and improving the programmatic, policy and funding actions taken on HIV prevention for young women and girls, targeting national, regional and international decision makers.

For more information visit:

<http://www.ippf.org/en/Resources/Guides-toolkits/HIV+Prevention+Report+Cards.htm>



(The flags of Cambodia, Cameroon, Papua New Guinea, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, India and Russia, countries for which there are report cards.)