



Global Campaign News March 26, 2003

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.

NEW! on the website:

Microbicides factsheets in 5 different languages.

Microbicides on Campus

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Update on N-9 Activities

For the last year, the Global Campaign has been working on multiple fronts to address the fact that many individuals are still seeking out and using lubricants and condoms containing Nonoxynol-9 in the mistaken belief that they offer added protection against HIV and STDs. Because these products, especially if used rectally, may actually increase infection risk, we have been advocating for their removal from the market.

Since releasing the "Call to Discontinue Nonoxynol-9 for Rectal Use" last September (www.global-campaign.org/n-9call.htm), we have seen some significant progress as a result of this advocacy. At the national level:

- Several condom manufacturers have stopped production of condoms with N-9. Among these are: Planned Parenthood, Johnson & Johnson's condom-producing subsidiary in Brazil and Mayer Laboratories--distributor of Maxx and Kimono condoms. Unfortunately, the top three condom manufacturers—Ansell Ltd., maker of Lifestyles condoms; Church & Dwight Company, maker of Trojan; and SSL International PLC, the parent company of Durex—have resisted. They argue that N-9 provides back-up protection against pregnancy if a condom breaks, despite the fact that there are no data to substantiate that claim.
- On January 16, 2003, the FDA issued draft regulations that would require manufacturers to add new warning labels to all over-the-counter (OTC) vaginal contraceptive drug products containing N-9. These warnings will advise consumers that N-9 contraceptives do not protect against HIV or other STDs and that frequent use of such products can increase vaginal irritation thus, possibly, increasing HIV

risk. We believe that these proposed regulations are insufficient because: (1) they do not address the risks posed by N-9 on condoms and lubricants and (2) they do not address the fact that, although spermicides with N-9 are designed for vaginal use, some people use them during anal intercourse. Any warning label applied to them, therefore, should explicitly warn that rectal insertion of these products can increase HIV and STDs risk. The FDA is accepting public comment on this proposed regulation until April 16, 2003. A complete copy of the regulations and the address to which to submit comments can be found at <http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/14mar20010800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2003/03-902.htm>. If you would like to receive a copy of the Global Campaign's comments, please contact Imogen Fua at ifua@path-dc.org.

- On March 18, 2003 California Assemblyman Paul Koretz (D-West Hollywood) introduced Assembly Joint Resolution 16 which urges the FDA to ban the sale of condoms and sexual lubricants containing N-9. AJR 16 also calls on manufacturers to stop producing N-9 condoms and asks retailers to stop selling these harmful products. The bill is currently sponsored by the Southern California HIV/AIDS Advocacy Coalition (SCHAC), a group of AIDS service providers and HIV positive individuals who advocate for sound HIV public policy, and the AIDS Services Foundation of Orange County.

A copy of the text of ARJ 16 and some talking points provided by Koretz' office are available **at hot link here**. Assemblyman Koretz expects this bill to come up for hearings in the California legislature's Assembly Health Committee this Spring and is requesting letters of support from NGOs, scientists and other experts in this field. The Global Campaign is sending a letter in support of AJR 16 and encourages others to do likewise. While this state legislation can only recommend action to the FDA, it nevertheless constitutes an important step forward that other states may emulate.

For additional information about the bill and its progress, please contact:

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At the grassroots level, several of the Global Campaign's local affiliates have undertaken important action on this issue in their own regions. The following is a sampling of those activities:

In Canada, the MAG-Net (Microbicide Advocacy Network Group), has drafted a letter to Health Canada to raise the issue and ask:

- What decisions has Health Canada made regarding the removal of Nonoxynol-9 from sexual lubricants and condoms available in Canada?

- What range of options is available to Health Canada regarding licensing, regulating and controlling the availability of products containing Nonoxynol-9 in Canada?
- How can community input be integrated in Health Canada efforts to remove these products and to raise awareness about the risks associated with use of products containing Nonoxynol-9?

MAG-Net is a coalition of over 30 Canadian AIDS service organizations, international development NGOs, researchers and advocates. It is coordinated by the Canadian AIDS Society.

In California, the California Microbicides Initiative (CaMI) is using the opportunity presented by AJR 16 to generate wider familiarity with the issue of microbicides among California's public health authorities and is working hard to cultivate public health support for effective consumer, manufacturer and retailer education on the issue.

In Illinois, the Beyond Latex Campaign has contacted Walgreens, the largest drug store chain in the midwest, and asked them to discontinue their sale of lubricants and condoms containing N-9. Walgreens requested extensive follow-up information and is considering this request.

In Washington, the Northwest Campaign for Microbicides is working its Health Department to develop a "health department approved" warning message re: danger of using N-9 products rectally. Once developed, the Campaign plans to print this message on "point of sales" placards and post them in retail establishments

The Pennsylvania Campaign for Microbicides discovered that the Philadelphia Health Department was still distributing N-9 condoms to NGOs it funds under HIV/AIDS contracts. They contacted the Department's AIDS Activities Coordinating Office (AACO) to request that only condoms lubricated without N-9 be distributed. AACO has now adopted this requested policy.

The Georgia Campaign for Microbicides ran an ad in the AIDS Survival Project's Survival News warning on the dangers of N-9.

The UK/Ireland Campaign for Microbicides has issued its own "UK Call for the Removal of N-9 from Condoms and Lubricants" (based in the Global Campaign's Call) and is gathering endorsements for it from leading scientists, advocates and NGOs in their region. They are also drafting a letter to the office of the UK Secretary for Public Health urging her to recommend that, as there is no benefit to N9 in condoms and lubricants, they it should be removed. N-9 condoms are still being supplied by the UK's National Health Service clinics, so the UK/Ireland Campaign is working to persuade the government to change its policy regarding their distribution.

Virtually all of the Global Campaign's affiliates (including those not mentioned) above are distributing information about the risks associated with N-9 at the presentations they

make and via the literature they distribute throughout their on-going microbicide education and advocacy efforts.

New Communication Tool Advances UNIFEM and UNAIDS Commitment to Reversing Epidemic

This new gender and HIV/AIDS web portal will provide researchers, policy-makers and practitioners access to cutting edge information at their fingertips. Developed by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), in collaboration with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the portal is a one-stop online resource center on the gender dimensions of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The web portal will be a constantly evolving, multi-dimensional and dynamic virtual space that promotes understanding, knowledge-sharing, and action on HIV/AIDS as a gender and human rights issue. User-friendly, informative and interactive, the site offers research, training materials, surveys, advocacy tools, current news and opinion pieces by leading experts, and women's stories from the field. Plans are also underway to house an experts database, which will serve as a technical and networking vehicle for national and global gender and HIV/AIDS specialists.

Please visit the gender and HIV/AIDS web portal at, <http://www.GenderandAIDS.org>.

"Relationship Power for Women Leads to Higher Rates of Condom Use"

(Source: Women's Health Weekly, March 7, 2003)

United States researchers have confirmed long-held assumptions about relationship power and safe sex. "Women's ability to negotiate safer sexual practices, particularly condom use, is a vital component of HIV/STD prevention strategies," according to J. Pulerwitz, a seconded PATH staff and her colleagues from the Population Council. "Gender-based power imbalances may constrain women's negotiation ability, yet few empirical studies have tested the hypothesis that sexual relationship power constitutes a key factor in condom use negotiation." The researchers applied "a new measure - the Sexual Relationship Power Scale (SRPS)" to data "collected from 388, mostly Latina, women at an urban community health center in Massachusetts."

Study data showed that "population attributable risk estimates indicate that 52% of the lack of consistent condom use among women can be attributed to low sexual relationship power," Pulerwitz and coauthors reported. They found that "women with high levels of relationship power were five times as likely as women with low levels to report consistent condom use, after controlling for sociodemographic and psychosocial variables."

"The strong association between the Sexual Relationship Power Scale and consistent condom use supports the hypothesis that relationship power plays a key role in safer sex

decision making," the researchers concluded. "These findings underscore the importance of including the issue of relationship power in the design and implementation of programs that promote sexual and reproductive health, as well as research investigating condom use and HIV risk." The study, "Relationship Power, Condom Use and HIV Risk Among Women in the USA" was published in *AIDS Care* (2002;14(6):789-800).

Microbicides in India: Microbicides' Stakeholder Meeting

(Source: Copyright SEA-AIDS 2002, February 2002)

The urgent need for expanded HIV prevention options for women in India was addressed once again at this year's National Convention of Indian Network of NGOs (IN N) on HIV/AIDS. The Seventh National Convention, which brought together over 200 delegates from the entire sub-continent as well as international participants, was held in Madurai, Tamil Nadu from February 26-28, 2003.

During the opening session of the second day, Ananthy Thambinayagam of the Global Campaign and Bobby Ramakant of HDN Key Correspondent, presented a recap of the "Community Stakeholders' Meeting on Prevention Options for Women in India", which was held last October in New Delhi. It was jointly convened by the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH New Delhi), the Global Campaign for Microbicides (GCM, Washington DC), the Indian Network of NGOs on HIV/AIDS (IN N) and the Gujarat AIDS Prevention unit (GAP). It aimed to inform and prepare the Indian NGO community towards active participation in expansion of women-focused HIV prevention options. It was an opportunity to learn more on female condoms and microbicides; a way to identify roles of NGOs in research, introduction, access and use; and to mobilize the involvement of community stakeholders in the entire development process.

Several major points, which came out of a lengthy discussion on advocacy at the Community Stakeholder's Meeting, were also highlighted at the IN N Convention. Meeting participants concluded that although prevention options for women would offer women improved methods to protect themselves, no technology can transform the unequal power and social dynamics that perpetuate women's vulnerability. In addition, messages that position female condom and microbicides as 'putting the choice in hands of women' should be carefully drafted so as to also emphasize men's role in making joint decisions about preventing infection and unwanted pregnancy. Finally, the focus of advocacy strategies and messages should be on expanding the range of prevention methods and not replacing one method with another.

It is clear that this meeting happened at the ripe moment for India, because although there had been ongoing advocacy initiatives for about two years or so, Phase III microbicides clinical trials will begin in 2003. Collective action is needed now in order to address issues on access and affordability of prevention options for women.

At the end of this year's Convention advocacy for prevention options for women was recommended to the IN N Board as a priority activity that group should include in its

agenda.

Gel may be sexual disease barrier

(By Amanda Dunn, Health Reporter, March 20 2003)

Human trials on a vaginal gel that may prevent the transmission of HIV and other sexual diseases could begin in Melbourne within months after successful animal trials.

The gel was developed by scientists at Melbourne company Starpharma. It has just been tested successfully on monkeys by researchers at the University of Washington.

Starpharma chief executive John Raff said the gel, which is put in the vagina before sex, had also proved successful in preventing transmission of genital herpes and chlamydia. The gel worked by preventing the fusion of the virus with cells in the body.

Dr Raff said microbicides were the primary strategy for preventing the spread of HIV, as vaccine trials to date had proved unsuccessful.

The next phase would involve further tests on monkeys to examine the minimum dosage required, and the effects of repeat doses.

Executive director of the Victorian AIDS Council, Mike Kennedy, said microbicides were a particularly important development for preventing HIV transmission because they gave control to women so they did not have to rely on their partners to use a condom.

"It shifts the capacity to control HIV infection to the one who is likely to be affected by penetrative sex," he said.

President of the Australasian Society for HIV Medicine, Andrew Grulich, warned that the road from animal trials to human trials and then market availability was a long one, and researchers did not know how successful microbicides would be in humans. The results, however, were promising, he said.

Dr Grulich said that vaccines have shown more promise than microbicides in human trials.

Down the track, he said, "there is some optimism that we could have at least a partially successful HIV vaccine".

Dr Raff said Starpharma was looking at adapting the gel so that it could be used anally.

We welcome your input and contributions. Correspondence can be addressed to 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.