Giving Women Power Over AIDS

A Traveling Exhibit on Women, HIV and Microbicides

Microbicides would be the most important innovation in reproductive health since the Pill.

The word "microbicides" refers to a range of different products that share one common characteristic: the ability to prevent the sexual transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infection (STIs) when applied topically. Microbicides could offer women the option to increase their protection against HIV/STIs when used with a condom or when condom use is not possible. With the right type of political will and public sector support a microbicide could be produced and made widely available in many forms, including gels, creams, suppositories, films, or as a sponge or ring that releases the active ingredient over time. A recent study conducted by the Rockefeller Foundation demonstrated that even a 60% efficacious microbicide could avert over 2.5 million cases of HIV in women over 3 years.

About the Global Campaign for Microbicides

The Global Campaign for Microbicides (GCM) is a broad-based, international effort to build support among policymakers, opinion leaders, and the general public for increased investment into microbicides and other user-controlled prevention methods. Through advocacy, policy analysis, and social science research, the Campaign works to accelerate product development, facilitate widespread access and use, and protect the needs and interests of users, especially women.

The Global Campaign pursues its work through a small core staff and by funding partner organizations to pursue activities that directly advance the Campaign goals and objectives. The Campaign Secretariat is housed at PATH (Program for Appropriate Technology in Health), a global organization that specializes in the health of women and children.

“In Her Mother’s Shoes” by The Seattle Times

In 2003, writer Paula Bock and photographer Betty Udesen of the Seattle Times traveled to Zimbabwe to get a first hand look at the reality of HIV/AIDS. The resulting photo-essay, “In Her Mother’s Shoes“, portrays the personal struggles against AIDS in Zimbabwe. The article focuses on one of the 11 million AIDS orphans in sub-Saharan Africa – Martha – who has recently lost her mother and father to AIDS and must now face a world where women have little options to protect themselves from becoming yet another statistic.

Their resulting essay provides a compelling account of citizens and policy makers should care about global AIDS and embrace research into new prevention technologies - especially for women.
The Global Campaign for Microbicides believes that Bock and Udesen have produced a gripping visual representation for deepening the understanding of women’s vulnerabilities and the role that new prevention technologies, such as microbicides and the female condom, could play in reducing women’s risk. In 2004 the Campaign worked closely with Bock, Udesen and The Seattle Times to adapt this remarkable photo-essay for a traveling exhibit so that others could break through the mind-numbing statistics that often serves as a barrier to understanding. The story was coupled with information that highlights the limited options young women have to protect themselves and the impact that microbicides could have.

The result - “Giving Women Power Over AIDS” – is a museum-quality, traveling exhibit. It is comprised of ten double-sided panels that are 6’7”x35.5”. On average the entire exhibit requires 800 square feet of space. One side of the exhibit will display an adaptation of “In Her Mother’s Shoes”, including enlarged reproductions of select photography from story. The other side will provide a brief overview of the global need for microbicides and its development (see diagram below). In addition to panels, portable tables have been constructed on which artifacts from sub-Saharan Africa that represent key ideas and themes in the exhibit are displayed. The exhibit is enhanced by accompanying materials which tell the story of why microbicides would be a critical new tool for addressing the HIV pandemic.

“Giving Women Power Over AIDS” is designed to educate the public and policymakers worldwide about the nature of women’s HIV prevention needs and urge them to take action as the development of microbicides depends largely on public funds. It is now being used as a centerpiece for an education campaign to raise awareness and support for microbicide research and global AIDS funding.

With support from the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS (an initiative of UNAIDS) and Global Campaign for Microbicides sites the exhibit began a 10-city tour in October 2004 to draw attention to the issues to which it gives voice. These sites work closely with the secretariat of the Campaign and are hosted by local family planning and/or HIV groups. To date, “Giving Women Power Over AIDS” has traveled to Philadelphia, Seattle, Washington D.C. and Atlanta and has been featured at community centers, universities, public libraries and a museum. It will go on to Connecticut, Baltimore, Boston, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Sacramento and Chicago.

To organize a showing of the exhibit please contact Katie West at the Global Campaign for Microbicides at 202-822-0033 or kwest@path-dc.org

For more information about the exhibit, please visit www.global-campaign.org/exhibit.htm

To view the full article “In Her Mother’s Shoes go to www.seattletimes.com/aids