



## Global Campaign News June 7, 2002

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.

We welcome your input and contributions. Correspondence can be addressed to [info@global-campaign.org](mailto: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.

### *In this issue:*

Introducing the New Global Campaign Website  
Circumcision protects against HIV transmission  
Microbicides 2002

### **New Global Campaign Website**

The Global Campaign for Microbicides is pleased to announce its new website at [www.global-campaign.org](http://www.global-campaign.org). We have revamped the entire site to better serve the needs of advocates to facilitate sharing of experiences and strategies within the movement. The Advocates' corner includes a private discussion forum, a download center for easy access to fact sheets, presentations, and other campaign materials; and links to useful publications and resources. You can also browse through Campaign Activities and discover the latest events from colleagues in the Global South, North America and Europe.

Newcomers to the movement can find a timeline that traces the microbicide movement all the way from 1957! You can also get the basic facts and issues behind the science, clinical testing, economics as well as the advocacy component. Other important documents include papers from the Rockefeller Microbicide Initiative, other resources for more HIV prevention options for women and of course, all the past issues of the GC News!

Visit the website NOW! Write us back and give us your comments on what you like and what we can improve.

### **Circumcision protects against HIV transmission** (*Reuters Health, 5/28*)

Circumcision could help protect against HIV transmission because the foreskin of the penis contains cells that are especially susceptible to HIV infection, according to a study presented at the annual meeting of the American Urological Association, Reuters Health reports.

Circumcision is known to reduce the risk of HIV infection two- to eight-fold, although the reasons for this protective effect have been unclear (Hitt, Reuters Health, 5/28). Scientists from Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke's Medical Center in Chicago examined foreskin tissue from eight children and six adults. The researchers examined the tissue for the presence of CD4+ T cells, macrophages and Langerhan's cells, all of which are "major HIV target cells." When compared to samples of female cervical tissue, the foreskin tissue contained higher proportions of CD4+ T cells, macrophages and Langerhan's cells, and adult foreskin tissues contained the highest proportion of such cells. CD4+ T cells and Langerhan's cells found on the inner surface of the foreskin were seven times more susceptible to HIV infection than cervical tissue cells infected under the same condition, the researchers stated (Estrada et al., "Biologic Mechanisms of HIV Infection of Human Foreskin: Implications for Transmission," May 2002). "During sexual intercourse, this inner layer is the area that becomes traumatized and infected. In fact, we were not able to infect the outer layer of foreskin," lead study author Carlos Estrada said. He stated that in developing countries, the "circumcision of children could provide a protective effect down the road." The scientists also found that the HIV receptor CCR5 was "especially predominant" on foreskin tissue cells infected with the virus. This finding suggests that products that block CCR5 receptors and that could be applied topically to the penis or vagina should be developed, the study states.

### **Advocacy at Microbicides 2002**

On May 14, the Advocacy Panel of the Microbicides 2002 conference in Antwerp offered positive proof of the existence of a worldwide multi-faceted microbicide advocacy movement. Presentations from North and South America, Asia and Africa vividly illustrated the indigenous growth and diversification of efforts that has occurred within the movement over the last two years.

Global Campaign director Lori Heise kicked off the panel with an overview of the policy and advocacy objectives of microbicide advocates worldwide. By comparing and contrasting the challenges faced by microbicides, vaccine and "universal access to treatment" advocates, Lori provided a thought-provoking analysis of the similarities and differences among these three closely-related branches of HIV/AIDS activism. Like the vaccine advocates, for example, we confront the challenge of promoting prevention tools that do not yet exist. On the other hand, we deal with the unique challenge of talking explicitly about gender and power as determinants of sexual risk -- a touchy topic that vaccine and treatment advocates do not routinely confront.

Lori's presentation concluded with an encouraging report on the field's progress to date, noting microbicide advocates can take credit for mobilizing at least \$40 million in new funding since the Microbicides 2000 conference two years ago. This represents one of the largest injections of funds into the field to date.

Lilja Jonsdottir of the Canadian AIDS Society described the Microbicide Advocacy Group Network (MAG-Net), a broad-based national effort sponsored by the Canadian AIDS Society to raise awareness and implement a grass-roots microbicides advocacy

strategy throughout Canada. The MAG-Net meets via quarterly, nationwide conference calls and has developed a database and listserv to facilitate collaboration and strategy development among its geographically far-flung network of members.

Princess Olufemi-Kayode described the process of effectively reversing media silence on HIV/AIDS issues in Nigeria by creating Journalists Against AIDS (JAAIDS), a media-based NGO. JAAIDS is mainstreaming news on microbicides and other woman-controlled prevention options by providing trainings, roundtables, bulletins and seminars for members of the Nigerian media to raise their awareness, and hence their coverage, of these issues. Some of the fruits of their efforts can be seen at [www.nigeria-aids.org](http://www.nigeria-aids.org), where material from JAAIDS six-month long, "Open Internet Conference" on HIV/AIDS are posted. This e-conference, which included "Vaccine, Microbicides and Female Condom" as one of its twelve topic themes, attracted participation from a wide body of stakeholders including PLWHAs, community activists, program managers, government officials, donors and others. Princess reported that the President of Nigeria is "finally taking on HIV/AIDS as a priority," a development attributable in part to the heightened media coverage generated by JAAIDS.

Bobby Ramakant followed up on Princess' presentation with some lively advice on "Tapping free media potential for microbicide advocacy". Since most NGOs can't afford media space, he provided a rapid-fire summary of the tactics used successfully to generate free coverage in the Indian press. Correct selection of messenger, timing and delivery method all contribute to getting the story covered and accurately framed. As a skilled journalist and committed activist, Bobby has gotten microbicide coverage in the Kashmir Times, The Indian Express and the Times of India, among other outlets, and produces a column called M-POWER every two weeks for the South Asian Women's Forum.

The panel concluded with South American activist Henriette Ahrens describing efforts to promote microbicide awareness and female condom access in Brazil. Between 2000 and 2001, they succeeded in doubling (from two million to four million) the number of female condoms purchased by the Brazilian government for distribution to women at highest risk of HIV infection. (By contrast, the government is purchasing and distributing 400 million male condoms annually) The increase in female condom access is, nevertheless, a substantial step forward -- as is the fact that an increasing number of NGOs (412 at last count) are now distributing the female condom to women who, otherwise, would be unable to get them.

Henriette and her colleagues in the Brazilian National STD/HIV Program have also persuaded the Brazilian National AIDS Program to convene a national stakeholders meeting on microbicides which will involve universities, governmental officials and NGOs with experience in microbicide advocacy. How exciting to see Brazil, the country that pioneered efforts to make universal access to HIV/AIDS treatment a reality in the Global South, take on the issue of female condom access and microbicide advocacy! In talking about the challenge of communicating clearly, Bobby Ramakant said, "when I show the moon to people, many see my fingers." In this panel, advocates showed us how

they are helping their countrymen and women to see the moon -- the realizable dream of safe, effective HIV prevention tools that anyone can use.