



Global Campaign News January 4, 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. If you would like to unsubscribe to the Global Campaign News, please reply to this e-mail with the subject line: UNSUBSCRIBE.

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Female Condom Technical Update: Strong Opinions Despite Gaps in Research

At a recent Technical Update on the Female Condom, convened by USAID and Family Health International, a majority of health program and policy participants felt strongly that USAID should add the female condom to its commodities' portfolio, when asked at a Technical Update on the Female Condom on December 18, 2001.. At the half-day meeting The Update was convened by USAID and Family Health International on December 18, 2001,. Speakers presented presented technical data on the female condom, issues and reviewed field experiences with the device of the female condom,, and identified gaps in our knowledge about how much of an the impact that female condom promotion could would have on HIV prevention.

At the end of the session, participants were asked to take a position on a variety of controversial questions. Although reasonable some participant people disagreed about certain certain aspects of female condom programming, the majority of participants felt that we know enough about its benefits that USAID should take a more active role in procuring and promoting female condoms, even in the absence of clear data demonstrating that the addition of procurement and programs, without waiting for the results of ongoing research about the extent to which these programs female condoms prevents additional more HIV and STD HIV and STD infections than beyond the male condom-only condom programs. A senior USAID official indicated that if in-country USAID country- missions want to pursue request female condom programs programs, the Agency USAID is eager to support them. However, several participants noted felt that missions need active also required some encouragement to prioritize female condom programmings.

While the female condom is definitely more expensive than the male condom, the Global Campaign believes that its benefits far outweigh its costs, especially particularly for women. In addition to preventing HIV infections, STDs, and unwanted pregnancies, the female condom empowers offers women an opportunity to women to negotiate and practice safer sex within their relationship--s, an empowering benefit that transcends beyond cost.

New Research Suggests Possible Approach for Reducing HIV Transmission through Breast-feeding (McKinney, Reuters Health, 12/11/2001)

In past studies the anti-malarial medication, chloroquine, has long been known shown to reduce the replication of HIV in vitro. Now, new findings laboratory studies in Belgium indicate have found that that it also "accumulates in high concentrations" in breast milk, suggesting a possible new approach to reducing HIV transmission through . This is a huge break-through for HIV positive women who can reduce the level of HIV in their breast breast-feedingmilk and lower the risk of passing the virus on to their children. In addition, chloroquine is a cheap, and widely -used widely available drug in developing countries that and therefore can be more accessible to developing countries where there is a high rate of transmission through breastfeeding. Chloroquine also does not carry the same social stigma frequently associated with as taking anti-HIV retrovirals drugs do . As a result, women could easily take chloroquine during breastfeeding without and can hopefully reduce women's fear of revealing their HIV status. The research team is now planning a study in Sub-Saharan Africa to examine the effects of the drug on the breast milk of HIV positive women. Further studies will be required to see if chloroquine works in real life to reduce HIV transmission during breastfeeding.

ICASA in Burkina Faso

At the 12th International Conference on AIDS and STDs in Africa (ICASA), held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso on December 9-13th, most delegates did not need to be convinced that existing strategies for HIV prevention for women are not always feasible. When introduced to the concept of microbicides, most conference-goers were overwhelmingly supportive and could not understand why such a product did not exist yet. "In Africa, women are dying now," one delegate exclaimed, "we need this product NOW."

On the second evening of the conference the Global Campaign hosted a reception attended by over 75 delegates. Sende Nsabimana, the Vice President of the National Network of the People Living with AIDS in Burundi and a member of the Society for Women in Africa Against AIDS (SWAA) Burundi, stressed the urgency of developing a vaginal microbicide as well as continued advocacy for the female condom. Many guests raised doubts about the female condom, pointing to its high price relative to the male condom and questioning the actual demand in countries in the global south. Mitchell Warren, the Director of International Affairs for the Female Health Foundation, encouraged participants to push local UN agencies to procure and subsidize the costs of the female condoms in order to improve their accessibility and affordability. Warren also

stressed that the lessons learned from female condom introduction will help pave the way for the successful introduction of microbicides, so it is important that female condom programs succeed.

Long-time advocate and Global Campaigner, Bode-Law Faleyimu, M.D. continued his usual enthusiasm for microbicides during his poster session at ICASA, titled "Prospects for Safer Sex Practice Among Commercial Sex Workers at Oil-Field Locations in Nigeria: Can the Vaginal Microbicide Oil the Community-Based AIDS Education?" The poster demonstrated that among a group of commercial sex workers who received workplace-based AIDS education, 92% were ready to use vaginal microbicides if available, affordable and effective in preventing HIV/STIs. Dr. Faleyimu, heads-up the Global Campaign's [??] Microbicides Advocacy Network based in Nigeria. Catherine Mutongwizo, a counselor, and Margret Mlingo, a research nurse in Zimbabwe presented "Acceptability of Vaginal Microbicide Use and Study Participation: Lessons Learnt from Women and Men in Malawi and Zimbabwe." The results of this study showed that response to the gel was favorable, with 81% of the women saying that they would be "somewhat" or "very willing" to participate in a future clinical trial of a similar product, even if it required using the product at every act of intercourse for 1 1/2 to 3 years.

Advocates in Action

On a rare afternoon of winter sunshine, about 25 Twenty-five activists from Canada, Cuba, Mexico, and the US gathered to discuss microbicide advocacy on December 3 at the North American AIDS Treatment Action Forum (NATAF) in Vancouver, British Columbia. Although primarily focused on HIV/AIDS treatment options, education and resources, the The NATAF agenda also covered prevention technologies such as (vaccines and microbicides), which topics that generated considerable interest among conference participants. The Dec. 3 "affinity group" discussion on microbicide advocacy was co-facilitated by Global Campaign Field Organizer Anna Forbes and Janet Madsen, Communications Coordinator for the Positive Women's Network in Vancouver and an active member of MAG-net, the trans-Canada-wide Microbicide Advocacy Group Network (MAG-net). convened by the Canadian AIDS Society and working in close collaboration with the Global Campaign for Microbicides. NATAF participants also learned more about the science of microbicide research from Dr. Polly Harrison, Director of the Alliance for Microbicide Development, who spoke on a Dec. 4 panel entitled "The Development of Preventive and Therapeutic Vaccines and Microbicides".

Global Campaign sites in the US have been both industrious and creative in raising the issue of microbicides with their legislators. Here's just a sampling of recently efforts: Global Campaign/Illinois, (hosted by AIDS Foundation of Chicago) enclosed a petition in support of the HR 2405 in a state-wide AFC fundraising letter AFC sent out recently. The petition, calling on House of Representatives Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-IL) to support and advance the Act, has been signed by over 100 Illinois voters to date and forwarded to Speaker Hastert.

Global Campaign/Washington, (the Seattle-based Northwest Microbicides Coalition,) pulled out all the stops to meet its goal of getting both of their US Senators to sign on as

prime sponsors of the Microbicide Development Act prior to its Nov. 30 introduction. Coming right down to the wire, the combined efforts of their membership-- including working pre-existing professional relationships, making legislative visits, phoning and e-mailing -- bore fruit. Both Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) and Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA) are prime sponsors of S. 1752. Global Campaign/Connecticut (aka Microbicides Now!) printed up 3000 postcards last summer urging their Representatives to co-sponsor the HR 2405. But what to do when they got signed postcards directed to legislators who had already signed on? Simple... they stamp a big red "THANK YOU" across the face of the postcard and sent it anyway. Always a way good to let the legislators know we're paying attention and appreciative!

Global Campaign/northern California (hosted by MAS - Microbicides as an Alternative Solution) had another great postcard idea. Theirs is a two-part card with a perforated strip down the middle. The bottom is a postcard that the recipient can sign, detach and send to her/his legislator. The top is a beautiful little fact sheet containing MAS contact information -- something for the recipient to keep.

Global Campaign/New York, hosted by the Harm Reduction Coalition and Planned Parenthood New York City, got electronically creative during our recent push to get senators to sign on as prime sponsors of S. 1752. When we asked them to get constituent calls going into Senator Clinton's office, members relayed the request through the e-mail "alert" lists that handle HIV/AIDS policy issues (as well as sending it out on their own Site network list). Result: within 24 hours, Sen. Clinton's phones started ringing off the hook in support of the bill. Amazing what a little networking can do!

Sheila Kibuka from Hope Africa International has been reaching out doing outreach with to the religious communitywomen's group on the issue of microbicides. Since her participation at the Church Women United Conference last summer in Milwaukee, she has received a lot of support and numerous invitations to speak at other church-related events. Resince her participation at the Church Women United Conference late this summer.