



Global Campaign News February 1, 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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Microbicides, Prevention, and Women are New "Areas of Emphasis" in HIV Research Plan

"There is a broadly recognized need and urgency to expand the range of preventive interventions for HIV transmission," said Office of AIDS Research Acting Director, Jack Whitescarver in the preface of the US National Institutes of Health's "FY 2003 Plan for HIV-Related Research." [<http://www.nih.gov/od/oar/updates/updates.htm>]. Whitescarver also states that microbicides "may offer one of the most promising preventive interventions that could be safe, effective, inexpensive, readily available and widely acceptable" though much research remains. This research has received a substantial boost, however, by the designation of a microbicides-specific section within the research plan. Microbicide research at NIH had previously been lumped under the "Therapeutics" section. The new section designation is not only more accurate, but also elevates the status of microbicides as an important area of research.

This image-boost for microbicides within the NIH, which is the biggest funder of AIDS research globally, is in no small part the result of advocates' efforts over the last few years. With the help of microbicides allies in Congress, advocates were able to request that federal agencies develop a coordinated plan for microbicide research and development, to avoid duplication and gaps. In addition, the directors of the Alliance for Microbicide Development and the Global Campaign for Microbicides contributed to the research plan, and worked to ensure that there will be space at the table for advocates and community representatives in the development of future plans. Meanwhile, the Global Campaign and partner organizations will continue to work for increased funding for research and development, and to ensure that adequate staff resources are devoted to microbicides work at NIH.

Gender Norms: Barrier to HIV Prevention

A study conducted by Dr. Quarraisha Abdool-Karim at the Nelson Mandela School of Medicine, South Africa, further revealed the recurring economic and social barriers that influence women's ability to protect themselves from HIV infection. It is the underlying exclusion of women from the formal economy, high unemployment and limited education that makes it difficult for women to negotiate healthy sexual relationships. As we advocate for microbicides and prevention options for women, we must also attend to these issues in order to fully address women's vulnerability to HIV.

Almost half (48.8%) of the 219 women surveyed did not believe that they had a right to refuse sex with their partner or to insist on condom use. By contrast, most women thought that their male partners had a right to have outside partners (62.2%).

Another 53% of women thought it was common for women to have multiple sex partners out of financial necessity. Almost all (97%) of the women received money from their sexual partners, and these relationships form part of their survival strategy.

Economic dependence on their partners instills in women a fear of threatening the harmony of relationships by raising condom use. Although the condoms' role in HIV prevention was widely recognized (94.5%), 93% of the women said that asking their partners to use condoms would indicate a lack of trust. Half of the women said their partners would get angry if asked to use condoms, while 29.7% said that their partners would leave them, and 28.5% feared their partners would threaten violence. Not surprisingly, only 12.8% of respondents had ever used a condom. (Journal of the American Medical Women's Association at http://www.jamwa.org/vol56/toc56_4.htm)

Microbicides Gains Important Ally in Melinda Gates

The February 4th cover story of Newsweek features Bill and Melinda Gates and the \$24 billion foundation they created to tackle vexing issues in global health. In an e-mail interview, Melinda Gates, articulates her deep commitment to microbicides. When asked about her aspirations, she responded, "My immediate global health goals for the foundation all center on the desire for us to keep pushing for more childhood immunizations in the developing world, swifter trials on a microbicide -- a product used vaginally to prevent sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS -- and a vaccine against AIDS. During the next decade I'm hopeful that an effective microbicide will be produced and inexpensively delivered to put the power of stopping AIDS into the hands of women." In her struggle to maintain a low public profile for her family and doing work for the foundation, Melinda adds, "As our children become older, I do envision increasing my role with the foundation. If a microbicide or AIDS vaccine comes along, if I feel I could really make a difference in furthering the distribution of these for the developing world in some way, I would likely give up even more anonymity to do so."

Upcoming Events

Global Campaign to Co-Sponsor Release of Key Microbicide Reports

On February 12th, 2002 the Global Campaign for Microbicides -- together with the International Center for Research on Women and the Alliance for Microbicide Development -- will host a briefing at the National Press Club in Washington D.C. to announce the findings of five studies on microbicide science and policy.

In June 2000 the Rockefeller Foundation invited key players -- international scientists, research organizations, pharmaceutical industry representatives, United Nations organizations, advocacy groups, and donors -- to come together to find ways to accelerate the development of safe, effective, and accessible microbicides. As part of this initiative, the foundation convened and supported working groups that met over the last year to produce five documents of critical importance to the field:

1. A scientific road map for understanding microbicides and accelerating their development
2. A pharmaco-economics study of the potential market size and expected return-on-investment for microbicide products
3. An assessment of the potential public health impact of microbicides and the millions of infections they could help avert
4. A framework to ensure consumer access to the products; and
5. An action plan for advocacy for microbicide research, development, and access

The last document -- the Global Action Plan for Microbicide Advocacy -- is a joint publication of the Rockefeller Working Group on Advocacy and the Global Campaign for Microbicides. We will be featuring excerpts and key findings from these reports in upcoming editions of *GC News*. For more information on the event or to receive a copy of the press release, please contact: info@global-campaign.org.

Save the Date for Pre-conference to Microbicides 2002

The Global Campaign for Microbicides will be hosting a pre-conference workshop on May 12, 2002 from 9:00-16:00 at the Alpha De Keyser Hotel in Antwerp, Belgium. The workshop will take place immediately prior to the Microbicides 2002 conference and will provide a consolidated overview of microbicide science and advocacy strategies. The workshop will provide an opportunity for advocates and newer microbicide supporters to share information and skills as well as discuss future goals in microbicide advocacy. We will be providing updated information in the upcoming editions of *GC News*. We encourages all those interested in participating to contact us by March 29, 2002 at athambinayagam@path-dc.org.

Advocates in Action

The Foundation of Education and Research for Women (FEIM), a Global Campaign partner organization in Buenos Aires, brought the issue of prevention options for women to the Fifth National Congress on HIV/AIDS in Argentina. With a small grant from the Global Campaign and samples of female condoms donated by the Female Health Foundation, FEIM staff ran an exhibit booth where they passed out buttons and information about microbicides and HIV prevention options for women. They also conducted a survey assessing Congress participants' familiarity with prevention methods for women prior to visiting the FEIM booth. Of the health professionals and AIDS

specialists surveyed, many more were familiar with the female condom than with microbicides, since it is an existing method, and about two-thirds had seen a female condom before. Only about a quarter of respondents were familiar with the concept of microbicides, indicating the potential for awareness raising among providers, professionals, and activists in Argentina. Thanks to FEIM for their contribution to this goal!