



Global Campaign News March 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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Over-the-Counter Lubes

A few articles have appeared in print recently suggesting that some sexual lubricants sold without prescription ("over-the-counter") are effective microbicides. An article in the Dec 01/Jan 02 issue of [Positive Living](#), for example, indicated that three such lubricants -- Astroglide, Vagisil and ViAmor -- have not only been shown to kill HIV in a test tube but also, "do not have irritating effects inside the vagina and rectum, which caused N-9 to increase the risk of HIV infection."

The problem with this statement is that, although Dr. Samuel Baron at the University of Texas has published data indicating that these products kill HIV *in vitro* (in test tubes in a laboratory), no studies have yet been done to determine whether or not these products cause irritation if used internally in the quantities in which candidate microbicides are generally applied (3-5 ml. intravaginally). Because the FDA approves their sale as sexual lubricants, some people assume that they could not be irritating. As lubricants, however, they are generally applied in very small amounts externally (on the vulva or penis), not internally by applicator as a microbicide would be.

Dr. Ralph Heywood, toxicologist and past scientific director at Huntington Research Centre, points out that over-the-counter lubricants generally contain a wide range of ingredients including perfumes, flavorings, preservatives and other products not clearly identified. It is not only possible, but likely that some of these ingredients may cause irritation if applied in sufficient quantity intra-vaginally or intra-rectally on a regular basis.

Dr. David Phillips, a microbicides researcher at the Population Council, adds that virtually all preservatives are toxic to HIV at some level. He contends that investigational studies should be done on all substances intended for internal use to determine whether their preservative content is cytotoxic (harmful to cells) and likely to damage vaginal or rectal epithelia. Unfortunately, Phillips notes, that over-the-counter lubricants fall under the FDA's safety rules for cosmetics, a category that does not require the same rigorous safety testing required for products classified as drugs. For this reason, very little is known about their safety profile.

Even presuming that over the counter lubricants were safe for use as microbicides, there is no evidence yet that they would actually work. Literally hundreds of compounds kill HIV in vitro, but the ability to protect the human body from infection during sexual intercourse is another matter entirely.

It is very tempting, as microbicide advocates, to imagine that over-the-counter products we already have at hand could meet the urgent need for non-condom prevention tools. As we learned with Nonoxynol-9, however, it's critically important not to make assumptions about a product's safety or effectiveness without adequate data. Part of our responsibility as advocates is to insist that products presented to the public as microbicides are first proven to be both **safe** and **effective** for use as microbicides. Perhaps one of these over-the-counter lubricants may, upon further examination, turn out to be a viable microbicide. But right now, there's no conclusive evidence to suggest that it's safe to use them in that way.

The Female Condom: Where are We Now and Where Should We Go

Following is a reprinted abstract from the *Journal of Urban Health*, Volume 78 (2001) on the challenges of the female condom. Also, in the same volume is a study by our colleagues, Sunanda Ray and Caroline Maposhere, on female condom use among sex workers in Zimbabwe. <http://www.jurban.oupjournals.org/content/vol78/issue4>

The female condom has been on the US market for over 8 years and was hailed as a method that would allow women greater control in protecting themselves against unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. However, since its launch, promotion of the female condom has met with challenges that vary from provider bias against the device, concerns about efficacy, and doubts about whether it will be used. While daunting, many of these challenges are not unique to the female condom. In fact, they parallel those of the tampon when it was first promoted in the US for menstrual hygiene in the early 1930s. Many providers were initially opposed to the tampon; early users found the tampon inadequate. Ten years after the introduction of the tampon and despite mass marketing, acceptability was mixed and use was modest (25% prevalence in a 26-city survey). Similar to female condom use observed in current-day prospective studies, users did not use the tampon exclusively or even predominantly. The story of the tampon demonstrates that a method does not have to be adopted by all users immediately to play an important role, and that even initially controversial

methods can become widely accepted as mainstream. The early history of the tampon sheds perspective, and hope, on where we stand with the female condom. While much-needed work is under way to develop microbicides, we should take advantage of the fact that the female condom is already available and promote it to those in need now.

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Global Campaign in Europe

On February 20, the Global Campaign, in collaboration with the London-based International Family Health (IFH), convened a day-long Microbicides Strategy Session for 25 of our European partners and potential partners. The group included NGO representatives from the UK, Ireland, Spain, Denmark, France and Germany as well as Global Campaign staff from the US. Working together, we developed a comprehensive overview of the current microbicides advocacy landscape in Europe and identified strategic steps to address the goals of raising awareness and advocating for increased European investment in and commitment to microbicide research and development. Participants agreed that IFH would serve as the coordinating body for this effort. IFH and the Global Campaign are working closely together to coordinate the European response with advocacy efforts worldwide.

This meeting, held in London, followed on the heels of a February 19 briefing sponsored by Rockefeller and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) at which DFID unveiled a £16 million, five year microbicide research collaboration it is funding. This initiative, together with a microbicides advocacy grant awarded to International Family Health by the European Union last year, sets the stage for the emergence of an active and effective microbicides advocacy campaign throughout Europe.

Microbicide Facts for Advocacy

The Global Campaign recently put together new talking points and numbers for advocates to use when talking about microbicide development. These talking points are based on the results of the studies initiated by the Rockefeller Foundation discussed in the last issue of the *GC News*. Visit our website's [resources page](#) and use the new information on topics including development costs, market predictions and the promising impact of a microbicide on public health.

Advocates in Action

Bobby Ramakant, a GC media correspondent, attended the 6th National Convention of the Indian Network of NGOs working on HIV/AIDS held in Bhubaneswar, Orissa from Feb. 26th- 28th. An informal survey was conducted to find whether conference participants, mostly implementers of HIV/AIDS projects throughout India, were familiar with microbicides. Almost half of the surveyed participants at the beginning of the

conference had heard of microbicides. Several participants responded to the question of what advocates should do about microbicides in India with suggestions ranging from raising awareness in the community, seeking the support of men, and assessing the acceptability of microbicides. Dr. Radium Bhattacharya, president of the network, is a strong advocate for female-controlled options. She said that the network will soon be holding a workshop for NGOs interested in putting microbicides and female condom advocacy on their agendas. She was excited to see the huge response from conference participants in signing the Global Campaign petition as well as their interest in the informational materials.