

---

# Communications: Why Planning is Essential

## Global Health Strategies for the Microbicide Trials Network

---

May 22, 2007



# Facilitators

## LUCY ORIANG

- Over 20 years experience as a journalist in Kenya
- Group Training Editor for the Nation Media Group, the largest media group in East Africa
- Columnist and activist working on health, politics, and women's rights issues

## VICTOR ZONANA

- Over 15 years experience with the *Wall Street Journal* and *Los Angeles Times*
- US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services under President Clinton
- Launched vaccine trials in Kenya and Uganda as Vice President for Communications at the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI)

# Agenda

**2:00-2:30 PM**

**Overview: Communications Planning**

Victor Zonana

Lucy Oriang

**2:30-2:45 PM**

**Case Studies**

Dr. Morenike Ukpong

Dr. David Coetzee

Prof. Gita Ramjee

**2:45-3:00 PM**

**Panel Discussion**

---

**“When it comes to AIDS, journalists can have more of an impact than doctors...”**

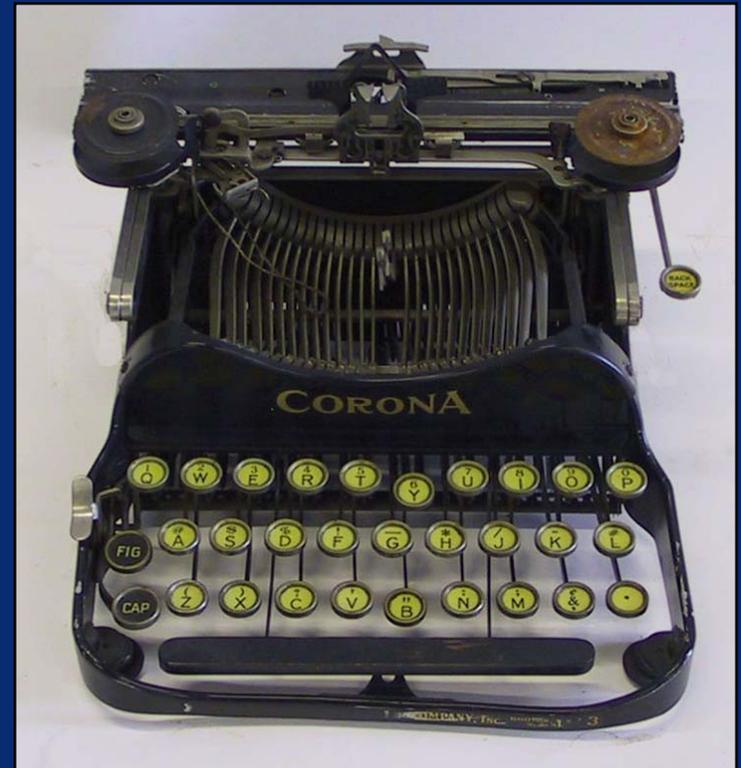
**Dr. Peter Piot, Executive Director of UNAIDS  
2002 International AIDS Conference, Barcelona**

# The Importance of Communications



# The Old Media Landscape

- Limited attention to HIV/AIDS or clinical research
- Lack of knowledge about microbicides among media and newsmakers
- Security in anonymity



# The New Media Landscape

- *Speed*: 24-hour news, Internet, Listservs, FM radio in Africa
- Local sparks become global firestorms
- Increased scrutiny
- Activists use the media aggressively



# Good Media Coverage Can Help a Study



- Community support
- Recruitment and retention
- Increased public, donor, government support
- Mitigates some effects of bad news coverage

# Bad Media Coverage Can Hurt a Study

WEST AFRICAN STANDARD, Thursday, December 21, 2000

NEWS

## Govt halts Aids vaccine trials



THE much anticipated launching of the first Aids vaccine trials in Kenya failed to take off yesterday.

There was a dispute over the patency of the research initiative. Public Health Minister, Prof Sam Ongeri, said the Government cannot launch an initiative which will undermine the intellectual property rights and patency of Kenyan researchers.

He said the Government views the issue as a major event and would not want to be relegated to the level of a co-author. The minister said HIV/Aids trials will only kick off once Government approvals have been granted.

The vaccine initiative is a joint venture between the University of Nairobi (UoN) and Oxford University. It is funded by the International Aids Vaccine Initiative (IAVI).

Ongeri said the issue of inventorship will be ironed out and the issue of intellectual property and patency rights sorted out in order to render meaningful effect to the research.

The research programme is a joint venture between IAVI, Medical Research Centre (MRC) and University of Nairobi.

The minister was speaking during the opening of Vaccine Research Centre, Department of Microbiology, at the University of Nairobi.

The minister said Kenyan scientists have been involved in research findings of the vaccine and it was only prudent for them to be granted patent rights.

Prof Anthony McMichael of the world's leading researchers in cellular immunity, the findings have a good chance of stimulating cellular immune responses to HIV.

The commissioning of laboratories at the UoN College of Health Sciences has been funded to the tune of US Dollars 4.5 million (Sh336 million) by the Medical Research Centre. Meanwhile, a National Policy Sessional Paper is ready, Ongeri said yesterday.

By Ben Ajina and Waringa Gichuru

**Burnt shopping**

ATTENTIVE: Participants pay total attention to contributors during the official opening ceremony of the Aids workshop. — Picture by Maarufu Mohammed

- Community antagonism
- Increased scrutiny from advocates, governments
- Damage to entire field
- Exaggerated coverage of negative results

---

# If You Fail to Plan, You've Planned to Fail

**“Just as we have SOPs for labs and adverse events, we need plans and procedures in place for media relations.”**

**- Sharon L. Hillier, Ph.D.**

# Plan to Ensure Successful Media Relations

1. Prepare for scenarios: DSMB meetings, study results, potential crises
2. Develop communications materials (key messages, Q&As, fact sheets, etc.)
3. Develop media SOPs and communications strategies
4. Identify stakeholders and journalists and build relationships early
5. **Prevention is the best strategy – but when you can't prevent, treat aggressively**

---

# Case Studies and Discussion

# Oral Tenofovir

## Violent protest over drug trials

Antoinette Miday and Susan Mwangi

Carrying placards and chanting anti-exploitation songs, protestors held the first violent protest at the conference yesterday, knocking down the stand of Gilead pharmaceuticals which they claim has been conducting unethical trials in some developing countries.

The demonstrators, the Asian Pacific Network of Sex workers and Act Up-Paris claim that the company is using people from the developing countries as guinea pigs in trials of its HIV drug Viread (tenofovir disoproxil fumarate).

Viread is Gilead medication. tablet taken drug works

verse transcriptase, an enzyme involved in the replication of HIV. The drug should only be used in combination with other antiretroviral agents in the treatment of HIV infection.

Trials to evaluate the drug are underway in Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria and Cambodia. Participants in the study comprise uninfected women who have high-risk occupational sex and a past history of sexually transmitted infections.

"The trials are unethical," said Liz Cameroon, a protestor



lifestyle," she said. the



# Carraguard

## Sunday Times

### **Girls bunk school to cash in on HIV trials**

“Schoolkids offered money to test gel product each time they have sex”

# Cellulose Sulfate

## Women used as Aids guinea pigs

*'Study to prevent Aids left me infected'*

WONDER HLONGWA AND MANDLA ZULU

WHEN Cabanille Mthethwa (not her real name) first joined a research programme on the use of microbicides as a preventive measure against contracting HIV/AIDS, she was a happy, healthy beauty.

But now, just over eight months since she joined a controversial research project on HIV prevention, she is a depressed young woman who has been infected with HIV/AIDS. Mthethwa (21), from Hlabisa in southern KwaZulu-Natal, is one of hundreds of women in South Africa, Botswana, Nigeria, Uganda and India who have been used as guinea pigs to test the new microbicides.

The study, conducted by Medical Research Council (MRC) and funded by Cochrane, a US-based research group for reproductive healthcare, was testing a gel known as Ushercell which was to prevent women from being infected.

"My friends used to tell me that it makes you feel in bed. They said my boyfriend will not stay when I apply it. But I was also attracted by the money you get when you are in the study," said Mthethwa.

When trials were called off this week, the gel was in phase three clinical trials – the last phase of drug testing on humans before approval for marketing. The study has become a money-making scheme for some young women in Durban.

James Nkomo from Unisa in Durban said she had registered in three of the MRC sites using three different names. Each of the participants is paid R150 a month.

An unemployed Nkomo said she was recruited by her friends who told her about this easy way of making money.

"We were told by the recruiters to visit drinking spots where there are many people and make ourselves available when men approach us."

"We would sleep with these people without a condom and



FACING A BLEAK FUTURE... These KwaZulu-Natal women were part of a research programme into microbicides

then go and make a presentation to the MRC people at Westville headquarters," she said. Nkomo said they were encouraged to sleep with as many people as possible.

"When you make a presenta-

tion, you must tell the researchers about your experience, what it was like and how many people you have slept with," she said. She refused to reveal her HIV status, saying only that she is "okay".

Women on the programme were told that if they contracted HIV they would not get any financial compensation, but would receive medical treatment and when their health deteriorated, they would get

ARVs. Part of the requirements is that participants must be HIV negative and be sexually active. She said it was tempting her poor people to participate in the research which they did not even understand.

"I don't know why I joined. I came the day I arrived when my friends who were already part of it convinced me to join. We used to talk about it and how it was making sex pleasurable," said Mthethwa.

She said she had a condom with her but although she did not use it because they saw her, they would protect her

## Concern over HIV trial researcher's workload

WONDER HLONGWA

Chatsworth and Hlabisa.

This study received R25 million from the US-based Institute for Health.

Ramjee oversees two other clinical trials – the Microbicides Development Programme, funded by the UK's Department of International Development for R18 million. This trial tests the PRO2000/5 gel.

The Population Council trial, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, worth R10 million, is testing a microbicide known as Carraguard.

Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang requested an investigation this week into whether the Ushercell study followed the protocols approved by the Medicines Control Council and the ethics committees of the relevant institutions.

The investigation is also expected to look at why Ramjee was running so many projects at once.

Sources within the MRC say Ramjee was allowed to do all these partly because she enjoys the support of MRC president Anthony Mbewu, who is married to Ramjee's colleague and friend, Dr Priscilla Reddy.

"We are confident that we have followed all approved protocols during trial implementation and that all clinical trials are conducted accord-

THE microbicide researcher who led the aborted clinical trial that resulted in a number of participants contracting HIV is receiving millions of rands in funding for three other microbicide trials in KwaZulu-Natal.

This has raised eyebrows among the research community on whether a single research unit can run so many clinical trials at once.

Professor Gita Ramjee, whose trials on Ushercell were halted last week, oversees four more research sites testing different gels in Hlabisa, northern KwaZulu-Natal, and Chatsworth, Verulam and Isipingo in Durban.

The Ushercell trials were stopped worldwide with immediate effect when preliminary results of the study showed a potential increase to the risk of HIV infection instead of lowering it.

Microbicides – likely to be delivered in the form of a gel, foam or cream – are being developed to help prevent the transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

Ramjee is the head of the SA Medicines and Research Council's HIV Pre-