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

- National & Local Governments
- Participants
- Trial Site Staff
- Scientists
- Global Policymakers
- Communities
- Activists & NGOs
- Journalists

GLOBAL HEALTH STRATEGIES
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

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

Antonette Mabey and Susan Mwangi

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

The demonstrators, the Asia Pacific Network of Sex workers and ActUp-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’s medication against HIV.

“Trials are unethical,” said Liz Cameron, a prosecutor at tonight’s conference.

The drug is used to suppress viral replication, 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 trial is unethical,’ said Liz Cameron, a prosecutor at tonight’s conference.”
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’

CONCERN OVER HIV TRIAL RESEARCHER’S WORKLOAD

THR microbicide researcher who led the aborted clinical trial that resulted in a number of participants contracting HIV is receiving millions of rand 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 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal were halted last week, oversees four more research sites testing different gels in Hlabisa, northern KwaZulu-Natal, and Chatsworth, Vosloorus and Inkatha in Durban.

The University 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 Medical Research Council’s HIV Prevention and Research Unit.

Concerning reports of a dispute between Ramjee and other researchers, Ramjee said: “I am not sure if there is a dispute. We have always worked harmoniously.”

Chatsworth and Hlabisa.

This study received R18 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 R14 million. This trial tests the PRO2000 gel.

The Population Council trial, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, worth R9 million, is testing a microbicide known as Carraguard.

Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang requested an investigation this week into whether the University 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 NICB say Ramjee was allowed to do so because she enjoys the support of NICB president Anthony Mwewa, 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 reports of adverse outcomes have been thoroughly followed up,” Ramjee said.

She denied the reports of a dispute between her and the NICB: “This is an unnecessary and baseless accusation.”