



September 2006 Newsletter

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Plan B Approved for Over-the-Counter Use: Only the First Step

For Immediate Release, August 25, 2006—On August 24, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced that Plan B emergency contraception, which is taken after unprotected sex to avoid an unintended pregnancy, has been approved for over-the-counter use by women 18 years and older. Although the age restriction imposed by the FDA creates an unnecessary barrier to access for adolescents, the announcement that Plan B will be available over-the-counter in the United States is welcome news. Plan B is safe and effective, and easier access to emergency contraception has the potential to reduce the number of unintended pregnancies, which represent a serious public health problem in the US and appear to be on the rise among women of color and low-income women.

Over-the-counter access to emergency contraception is only the first step, however. If we are truly serious about reducing unintended pregnancies and abortions in the US, we must improve access to all family planning meth-

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ods for all women. Available for over 40 years and used by millions of women, oral contraceptives (birth control pills) are one of the best-studied medications on the market today, and they have been proven safe, effective and easy to use. Oral contraceptives meet the FDA's requirements for a medication to be available over-the-counter. However, an over-the-counter switch for oral contraceptives must be accompanied by changes in the financing and distribution of contraceptives to improve coverage and ensure access for all women. We must not let a flawed health care system stand in the way of access to family planning and an opportunity to improve women's health.

The approval of Plan B as an over-the-counter product is a momentous step for American women and their partners and will undoubtedly allow couples to plan their pregnancies better. The next step is to ensure that all women have access to safe, affordable contraception by making daily oral contraceptives available over-the-counter as well.

Meeting on Reproductive Health Along the US-Mexico Border

On July 26, Ibis brought together a group of approximately 70 researchers, advocates and clinicians in San Diego, CA to discuss issues related to reproductive health along the US-Mexico border. The meeting was co-sponsored by the University of California—San Diego, the Population Council, and Planned Parenthood of San Diego and the Riverside Counties. The University of California Institute for Mexico and the United States (UC MEXUS) and the California-Mexico Health Initiative (CMHI) also provided support for the meeting.

Silvia Henriquez of the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health (NLIRH) and Norma Ojeda of San Diego State University were the keynote speakers. Ms. Henriquez highlighted the many health disparities that affect Latina immigrant women and articulated some of the knowledge gaps where research could provide useful information for advocates working in this area. Dr. Ojeda presented a recent binational survey of Latinas in California and Mexican women in Baja California that focused on access to reproductive health services and attitudes related to abortion.

Dan Grossman of Ibis discussed the results of a recently completed quantitative and qualitative study on Mexican women who cross the border to San Diego to access safe, legal abortion. Eduardo Gonzalez of the Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Tijuana also presented on this topic, and Olivia Ortiz, a consultant from Ipas-Mexico, spoke about a qualitative study that explored how to disseminate information about the effective use of misoprostol in Mexico. Claudia Diaz of the Population Council gave an overview of advocacy efforts underway in Mexico to increase access to legal abortion.

The final session of the meeting consisted of brief presentations by clinicians working in both San Diego and Tijuana and led to a discussion about ways to improve the linkages among these service providers. Participant feedback on the meeting was very positive, and there was a great deal of interest in making this an annual event. For more information, please contact Dan Grossman (dgrossman@ibisreproductivehealth.org).

AIDS Conference Stresses Need for Attention to Prevention

A major theme of the XVI International AIDS Conference, held in Toronto, Canada last month, was the need to focus on prevention of HIV transmission, particularly female-controlled methods.

Bill Gates opened the conference by stating, "No matter where she lives, who she is, or what she does, a woman should never need her partner's permission to save her own life." Melinda Gates added, "We need a constant stream of new innovations—especially those that put the power to prevent HIV in the hands of women." The Gates Foundation is funding several clinical trials to develop a microbicide—a gel or other substance applied topically to reduce HIV transmission. Gates also

supports the Methods for Improving Reproductive Health in Africa (MIRA) study, led by the University of California San Francisco in collaboration with Ibis, the University of Zimbabwe, the South African Medical Research Council and the Perinatal HIV Research Unit. The study aims to determine whether the diaphragm with Replens[®] lubricant gel may reduce HIV acquisition among women.

Gita Ramjee of the Medical Research Council in South Africa advocated for an expanded list of prevention strategies. To the well-known ABCs (*i.e.*, abstain, be faithful to one partner and use a condom), Dr. Ramjee proposed adding several prevention methods currently under investigation: the diaphragm (D), exposure prophylaxis—pre and post (E), female-controlled microbicides (F), genital ulcer treatment (G), HSV-2 or genital herpes suppressive therapy (H) and immune suppressive therapy (I).

The Caucus for Evidence-Based Prevention, of which Ibis is a member, worked during the conference to emphasize the need to implement existing prevention methods. This included increasing sex education for young people, expanding harm reduction programs (*e.g.*, access to sterile syringes) for injecting drug users and committing resources to develop new tools including microbicides, vaccines and social interventions such as addressing gender-based violence. Information is available at <http://caucus.hiv-prevention.org>.

The Global Campaign for Microbicides (GCM), the NAZ Foundation International, the AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition and Ibis collaborated on a panel to highlight the importance of partnering to advance new prevention technologies. Panelists described progress on the development of vaginal and rectal microbicides, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) (the use of anti-retrovirals to protect against HIV infection), and cervical barriers. Ibis also teamed up with the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative, GCM, the Center for Health and Gender Eq-

uity, and the World Health Organization to promote investment in female-controlled prevention methods including cervical barriers, an HIV vaccine, microbicides and female condoms, the only currently available female-initiated method. Audience members were particularly interested in how women and girls will gain access to these methods and how to be effective advocates for female-controlled HIV prevention strategies.



Presentation in Women's Networking Zone at Toronto AIDS Conference.

Although prevention was highlighted as critical to stemming the HIV pandemic, it was also widely acknowledged that these activities must be undertaken while simultaneously striving for universal access to treatment and addressing the existing gaps—financial, political and scientific—which impede attainment of this goal.

New Ibis Board Members

Ibis would like to welcome our two new at-large board members Ms. Beth Fredrick and Dr. Vanessa Northington Gamble.

Ms. Fredrick is the Executive Vice President of the International Women's Health Coalition, having worked over two decades with the Guttmacher Institute. She serves on the Boards of EMpower, ScenariosUSA, the Thiele-Sardina Foundation and is an advisor to WISH-NY (Women's Initiative to Stop HIV).

Dr. Gamble is Director of the Tuskegee University National Center for Bioethics in Research and Health Care. The Center—the only bioethics center at a historically black university—focuses on bioethics, minority health, and public health. Dr. Gamble is an internationally recognized expert on the history of race and racism in American medicine, racial and ethnic disparities in health and health care, cultural competence, diversity, and bioethics. Dr. Gamble is also a member of the Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences.

Dr. Gita Ramjee Recognized for Pioneering Research

Join us in congratulating our colleague, Dr. Gita Ramjee who was selected as a finalist for the South African Shoprite Checkers/SABC2 Woman of the Year Award 2006 in the Science and Technology category. Gita is the Director of the HIV Prevention Research Unit at the South African Medical Research Council in Durban and a Co-Principal Investigator in the MIRA diaphragm and gel HIV prevention trial. Dr. Ramjee is widely known for her research on female-controlled HIV prevention methods. Her unit has 245 staff that manage eight clinics in and around Durban where her HIV-prevention research is conducted. She has made an enormous contribution to women's health research.

Fifth OC OTC Meeting Held

On August 4th Ibis hosted the fifth meeting of the working group on oral contraceptives over-the-counter (OCs OTC). The meeting was held at the Guttmacher Institute in New York and was attended by 27 researchers, advocates and clinicians, including a number of new participants. We were very pleased to have Larry Finer of the Guttmacher Institute present data on contraceptive use, unintended pregnancy and abortion rates from the National Survey of Family Growth. According to Larry, 89% of American women at risk of pregnancy use some form of contraception. However, 11%, or 5 million women, do not use any method and are therefore at risk of unintended pregnancy. The percent of women not using contraception has increased in the last 7 years, and although the unintended pregnancy rate has declined in some populations, including among teens and women over 35, it has increased among low-income women and those aged 20-34. Low-income and black and Hispanic women continue to have higher rates of unintended pregnancies, abortions and unintended births compared to women with higher incomes and white women. The working group is committed to improving access to effective contraception and to ensuring that all women are able to control if and when they have children. If you would like more information about the working group, please contact Kate Schaffer at kschaffer@ibisreproductivehealth.org.

Summer Learning in South Africa



Three months have passed since June 2006, yet it seems like only yesterday I started my internship here at Ibis Reproductive Health. I have had an amazing time learning more about the field of reproductive health, specifically working

Phumelele Trasada on the MIRA and Provider Diaphragm Study. Working here has given me insight to the importance of providing women with not only the opportunity to make their own choices regarding their reproductive health, but also with HIV prevention methods. I have also gained an appreciation for dedication and diligence it takes to work in the public health field. I would like to thank Chiweni Chimbwete for giving me this internship, as well as Ethel, Mthoko, Laaiqah, Naomi, Tanusha, Khwezi, and Rachel for making me feel so welcome here at Ibis.

We Moved!

In July we relocated our Cambridge office. Please make note of our new address:

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Access to Female Condoms Global Campaign

Prevention Now! is a new global campaign launched by the Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) to promote universal access to female condoms and other prevention methods

to decrease the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections and reduce unintended pregnancies worldwide. More than 100 organizations, including NGOs, research organizations, and



multilateral institutions concerned with human rights, sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS have joined the campaign, including Ibis Reproductive Health. In addition, two new publications highlight the evidence about the effectiveness and impact of the female condom, identify challenges to wider use and suggest steps to strengthen condom programming worldwide. *Female Condom: A powerful tool for protection* and *The female condom: Significant potential for STI and pregnancy prevention* are available at www.preventionnow.net.

30 Years is Enough! Campaign

The Hyde—30 Years is Enough! Campaign brings attention to three decades of injustice caused by the Hyde Amendment and state bans on public funding for abortion care. Coordinated by the National Network of Abortion Funds (NNAF) and supported by women's and economic justice groups across the country, the Hyde Campaign calls for an end to the denial of abortion coverage under Medicaid and other government health programs. We also call for culturally competent family planning services and support for low-income women to care for themselves and their children with dignity.

For more information about the campaign or to get involved, please visit www.hyde30years.nnaf.org or contact NNAF at 617 524 6040 or info@nnaf.org.

New Publications by Ibis Staff

- **Foster A**, Wynn L, Rouhana A, Diaz-Olavarrieta C, **Schaffer K**, Trussell J. Providing medication abortion information to diverse communities: Use patterns of a multi-lingual website. *Contraception*. 2006;73(4);264-271.
- Yeatman SE, Potter JE, **Grossman DA**. Over-the-counter access, changing WHO guidelines, and the prevalence of contraindicated oral contraceptive use in Mexico. *Studies in Family Planning*. 2006. *In print*.
- Lara D, Abuabara K, **Grossman D**, Diaz C. Pharmacy provision of medical abortifacients in a Latin American city. *Contraception*. 2006. *In print*.

Upcoming Events

[International Federation of Professional Abortion and Contraception Associates \(FIAPAC\) Meeting](#)

October 13 - 14, 2006: Rome, Italy

This conference is sponsored by FIAPAC and this year's theme is "Freedom and Rights in Reproductive Health."

[American Society for Reproductive Medicine 62nd Annual Meeting](#)

October 21 - 25, 2006: New Orleans, LA

This is an annual reproductive health technologies trade show. This year's theme is "Global Change in Reproductive Health." This meeting will provide clinicians, researchers and allied health professionals in-depth learning about a variety of concepts in reproductive medicine, biology and healthcare.

[Global Forum for Health Research](#)

October 29 - November 2, 2006: Cairo, Egypt

A forum to transform research into policy, this conference is co-hosted by WHO's Global Forum for Health Research and India MOH, Indian Council of Medical Research and National Institute for Research in Reproductive Health in Mumbai.

[American Public Health Association Annual Meeting](#)

November 4 - 8, 2006: Boston, MA

This yearly conference is hosted by the American Public Health Association and attracts more than 13,000 national and international physicians, administrators, nurses, educators, researchers, epidemiologists, and related health specialists. This year's theme is "Public Health and Human Rights."

[World Congress of Obstetrics and Gynecology](#)

November 5-10, 2006: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

The program is divided into four tracks: women's health issues (including psycho-social issues, general gynecology and urogynecology), maternal and fetal medicine (including general obstetrics), reproductive medicine and gynecological oncology. The scientific program will consist of keynote lectures, plenary sessions, concurrent symposia, free communication, poster and video sessions. To make the scientific program more interesting, some interactive sessions such as debates and case discussion are included. In addition, there will also be some special sessions included in the program.

Charlotte Ellertson Fellowship Update

We are delighted to welcome five new fellows selected for the second round of the Charlotte Ellertson Social Science Postdoctoral Fellowship in Abortion and Reproductive Health. Fellows work on their own independent research, participate in ongoing institutional research, and collaborate with advocates, providers and policy makers to use research expertise to improve policies and programs. All begin their fellowships in September.

Dr. Courtney Jackson will be at Ibis Reproductive Health in Cambridge. She received her Ph.D. in Sociology and a graduate certificate in Women's Studies from Rutgers University.

Dr. Marcia A. Ellison will be at the Bixby Center for Reproductive Health Research and Policy at the University of California, San Francisco. She completed her Ph.D. and M.A. in Anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Dr. Jessica Gipson will be at the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University. She earned her Ph.D. in Public Health at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, and her Master's in Public Health at the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.

Dr. Farzana Kapadia will be at the Guttmacher Institute in New York City. She earned her Ph.D. in Epidemiology from the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University, and she also holds a MPH in Community

Health Education from New York University.

Dr. Joanna Mishtal will start up at the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University. Her Ph.D. is in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Colorado, Boulder.

We look forward to sharing the new fellows' work and achievements over the course of the fellowship.

We'd like also to extend our warmest congratulations to the four "graduating" fellows from the first round of the fellowship who are all going on to exciting work and positions:

Dr. Henderson will continue at UCSF with her research on reproductive health care quality and access in the U.S., and on abortion in Nepal.

Dr. Kimala Price will be an assistant professor of women's studies at San Diego State University (SDSU), a tenure-track faculty position.

Dr. Rachel Roth will continue to work on imprisonment and reproductive rights with the support of an 18-month Soros Justice Fellowship from the Open Society Institute.

Dr. Amy Schalet has accepted a position as an Assistant Professor of Sociology in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

To join the Ibis Reproductive Health mailing list, please email admin@ibisreproductivehealth.org.
