

## Fall 2005 Newsletter

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### Oral Contraceptives Over-the-Counter

On August 5th, Ibis convened the third meeting of the OCs OTC working group, which is investigating the feasibility of making oral contraceptives (OCs) available over-the-counter (OTC). The meeting was held at Population Action International in Washington, DC and was attended by approximately 25 clinicians, researchers and women's health policy experts. The meeting focused on the issue of access to OCs and high quality health care. Working group members discussed concerns about public perceptions of the safety of OCs under the current prescription environment and also reviewed the possibility of a "behind-the-counter" category. The group continued to discuss whether their efforts should focus on a switch for COCs or POPs first. The consensus was that since the group is divided, members should work to fill in research gaps and investigate both options for the time being, with agreement that the ultimate goal is having both products available OTC.

Ibis staff members Emily Shortridge and Dan Grossman presented new analyses of data on the prevalence of contraindications for OCs among US and Mexican women, respectively, which suggest that OC users tend to be healthy and well-screened, whether they use OCs in a prescription environment like the US, or in Mexico,

where OCs are *de facto* OTC. Ibis staff member Kate Schaffer gave a presentation comparing the safety, efficacy and use patterns of combined pills (COCs) and progestin-only pills (POPs). Don Downing, a pharmacist from the University of Washington gave an overview of the Direct Access Study, a pilot project in Washington State that allows women to obtain hormonal contraceptives from participating pharmacists without screening or a prescription from a doctor, and Belle Taylor-McGhee of Pharmacy Access Partnership presented data from national surveys of women and pharmacists, which indicate widespread interest in access to hormonal contraceptives without a prescription but with screening from a pharmacist.

The working group will hold an informal meeting for those attending the Association for Reproductive Health Professionals (ARHP) annual conference in St. Petersburg, Florida September 7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>. ARHP is planning a "Great Debate" on the topic of OCs OTC at the conference, so this will be an opportune time for the group to informally come together.

For more information, please email Kate Schaffer at [kschaffer@ibisreproductivehealth.org](mailto:kschaffer@ibisreproductivehealth.org).

### Article Analyzing Use of First Arabic EC Website Shows Need

Users of the Arabic-language version of NOT-2-LATE.com demonstrate significant interest in emergency contraception (EC) as well as in general reproductive health issues. The use patterns of the first Arabic-Language Web site dedicated to EC suggest a need for greater availability of Arabic-language health education resources through the internet. The article, entitled "Reproductive health, the Arab world and the internet: Usage patterns of an Arabic-language emergency contraception web site" appears in the August issue of *Contraception*. Even in the absence of a specific advertising campaign, the website received 39,217 visits and over 78,000 page requests in the first 19 months. "The results of this study leave no doubt that there is interest in Arabic-language materials dedicated to EC and other forms of contraception," Dr. Angel Foster said. "Creating online health information resources should be considered just one part of a multimodal effort to provide

accurate health information to both providers and EC users." The English-language Web site—NOT-2-LATE.com—was launched in 1994 and is jointly operated by the Office of Population Research (OPR) at Princeton University and the Association of Reproductive Health Professionals (ARHP). The Arabic-language Web site was adapted from the English-language site and was launched in May 2003 by Ibis Reproductive Health and OPR. The site also has been translated into French and Spanish. A second recently published article examines Western assumptions regarding the challenges to expanding EC access in the Arab World. The article, entitled "The politics of emergency contraception in the Arab world: Reflections on Western assumptions and the potential influence of religious and social factors" appears in the Spring issue of the *Harvard Health Policy Review*. For more information about these articles, please email [afoster@ibisreproductivehealth.org](mailto:afoster@ibisreproductivehealth.org).

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## Emergency Contraception Likely to Go Over-The-Counter in Massachusetts

In June, the Massachusetts State Senate voted unanimously in support of the Emergency Contraception bill (SB 546). The bill would require hospital emergency rooms to offer emergency contraception (also known as the morning-after pill or EC) to rape survivors and allow women to access EC directly from trained pharmacists without a prescription. The House voted 142-9 to enact the bill.

However, Governor Mitt Romney vetoed the EC bill saying he believes that EC can cause an abortion and should not be available to minors without parental consent. (If a woman is already pregnant, the pills have no effect.) When he ran for Governor in 2002, Mitt Romney pledged to support increased access to EC. The legislature will have the opportunity to override the veto when they are back in full session, most likely in the fall. *For more information about efforts to increase EC in Massachusetts, visit [www.massECnetwork.org](http://www.massECnetwork.org).*

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## Call for Proposals for Women and Media Conference in 2006

The Center for New Words, a feminist nonprofit organization based in Cambridge, MA, is seeking proposals for its 3<sup>rd</sup> annual conference "Women, Action & the Media: Making Dollars, Making Change" (WAM! 2006). It will be held at MIT March 31-April 2, 2006.

The conference will bring together more than 300 participants for a weekend of information sharing and strategizing on how to get more progressive women's voices in the media. The past two conferences have featured notable speakers such as Katha Pollitt, Medea Benjamin, Marie Wilson, Julianne Malveaux, Jill Nelson, Amy Goodman, Daisy Hernandez, Rita Henley-Jensen, Lisa Jervis, Shelley Lewis, Elaine Lafferty, and Noy Thrupkaew.

In an effort to expand participation beyond journalists and other media specialists, CNW is especially eager to receive proposals from researchers, academics, students, activists, young women and women of color on a wide range of progressive issues. The submission deadline is **October 10, 2005**. Proposals should be between 250-500 words in length and sent to [cfp@centerfornewwords.org](mailto:cfp@centerfornewwords.org). For full submission details, visit CNW's website [www.centerfornewwords.org/](http://www.centerfornewwords.org/). *For more information about the conference, please email Dr. Kimala Price at [kprice@ibisreproductivehealth.org](mailto:kprice@ibisreproductivehealth.org).*

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## Tune Into "Enduring Choice"

Making Contact, a program of the National Radio Project, debuted a new radio documentary on reproductive justice in August. Entitled "Enduring Choice," the segment profiles the "growing number of women [who] are seeing the link between their reproductive health, their civil liberties, the environment and economics" and "the common thread that connects women from all walks of life." Ibis fellow Rachel Roth consulted with producer Sarah Olson. Listen or read the transcript at: <http://www.radioproject.org/>

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## RHI and ARHP Merge

In 2005, the Reproductive Health Initiative (RHI) programs were integrated into the work and mission of the Association of Reproductive Health Professionals (ARHP). ARHP is committed to continuing and strengthening RHI's programs and looks forward to working with RHI's supporters to improve reproductive health care training in preservice medical education. Programs and publications that transitioned to ARHP include the [Reproductive Health Model Curriculum](#). Used in fourth-year electives in medical schools throughout the country, the *Curriculum* covers topics such as abortion, contraception, sexually transmitted diseases, primary care for infertility, and psychosocial factors including physician/patient communication. Free copies can be downloaded at [www.arhp.org/curriculum](http://www.arhp.org/curriculum). Other publications include:

- [Resource Guide for International Preservice Medical Education](#)
- [International Directory of Reproductive Health Opportunities for Medical Students](#)
- [Medical Student's Guide To Improving Reproductive Health Curricula](#)

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## Gender-based Violence in the Arab World

On June 8, 2005, Ibis Associate Dr. Angel Foster gave a talk at the Woodrow Wilson International Center in Washington D.C. entitled "Gender-based violence in the Arab world: An examination of media myths and contemporary realities." Dr. Foster's lecture focused on efforts in Tunisia and Jordan to address domestic violence, dating violence, and honor killings. Sponsored by the WWIC and supported by USAID's Office of Population and Reproductive Health and the Interagency Gender Working Group, Dr. Foster's speech was the fifth in a six part series entitled "Islam, Gender, and Reproductive Health." *More information about the presentation can be found at <http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/Archive/2005/Jun/15-735866.html>.*

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## U.S. Gov't to Deny HIV/AIDS Funds to Groups Lacking Anti-Prostitution Policy

The U.S. Agency for International Development announced on June 9<sup>th</sup> that the U.S. will require all American organizations to pledge their opposition to prostitution and sex trafficking in order to be eligible for U.S. funds to combat HIV/AIDS in the developing world. This policy will apply to all U.S. assistance from all government sources under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief.

In response to public pressure, the administration backed down from its earlier version of the policy and will *not* require United Nations agencies or the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria to enforce the new U.S. "loyalty oath." Since 2003, all foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) seeking U.S. global HIV/AIDS funds have been required to take this pledge and now, for the first time, such a limitation will be imposed upon U.S. organizations. Beyond compromising the free-speech rights of Americans, this provision undoubtedly will impede the ability of some organizations to gain the trust of commercial sex workers and their partners and thus may prevent effective work with this group, which is at particularly high risk for HIV infection. *For more information, visit:* <http://www.agi-usa.org/media/index.html#ews2>

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## New Publications by Ibis Staff

- **Backes K**, Forbes A, **Polis C**. One Choice is No Choice: The need for female-controlled HIV prevention tools for women and girls worldwide. *Harvard Health Policy Review* 2005;6(1):19-30.
- **Blanchard K**, Shochet T, Coyaji K, Thi Nhu Ngoc N, Winikoff B. Misoprostol alone for early abortion: an evaluation of seven potential regimens. *Contraception* 2005;72:91-97.
- **Foster A**, Wynn L, Rouhanna A, **Polis C**, Trussell J. Reproductive health, the Arab world and the internet: usage patterns of an Arabic-language emergency contraception website. *Contraception* 2005;72:130-137.
- **Polis C**, **Schaffer K**, **Harrison T**. Accessibility of emergency contraception in California's Catholic hospitals. *Women's Health Issues* 2005;15(4):174-8.
- Wynn L, **Foster A**, Rouhana A, Trussell J. The politics of emergency contraception in the Arab world: Reflections on Western assumptions and the potential influence of religious and social factors. *Harvard Health Policy Review Spring* 2005;6(1):38-47.

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## Update: EC Strategy Meeting is a Success in South Africa

In the last Ibis newsletter, we reported on the need to increase knowledge about and use of emergency contraception (EC) in South Africa. Although EC is available in pharmacies without a prescription and the method is free in public sector health clinics, research has shown awareness and use to be low among family planning clients. Further, little is known about provision of EC for specific populations such as victims of sexual assault, HIV-positive women, and adolescents.

Ibis Reproductive Health co-convoked a meeting entitled "South Africa: Emergency Contraception Strategy Meeting" to address these issues. With 19 participants representing departments of health, non-governmental organizations, and academic institutions, the group discussed challenges and provided recommendations for activities that could increase awareness about and use of EC. The two main outcomes of the meeting were 1) the selection of three priority areas for future activities (EC for victims of sexual assault, integrating EC into HIV prevention and treatment programs, addressing unmet family planning/EC needs for adolescents), and 2) the formation of a steering committee to guide development of the proposed EC initiatives.

Immediately following the EC meeting, the Family Planning and Reproductive Health Unit of the University of Stellenbosch, the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health and the Reproductive Health and HIV Research Unit launched a 24-hour toll-free hotline for EC information and referrals to youth-friendly providers in KwaZulu-Natal. The hotline is the second such resource in the country, sharing resources with a hotline already established in the Western Cape.

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## New Ibis Staff Members

Ibis welcomes four new staff members:

**Dan Grossman, Medical Associate:** Prior to joining Ibis, Dan held the position of Health Specialist at the Population Council in Mexico City. Dan is based in Ibis' San Francisco office.

**Sarah Martin, Research Assistant:** Sarah comes to Ibis from the Office of Population Research at Princeton University. Sarah is based in Ibis' Cambridge office.

**Julia Matthews, Project Manager:** Prior to joining Ibis, Julia was the Senior Coordinator for the Reproductive Health Program at the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children in New York. Julia is based in Ibis' Cambridge office.

**Tanusha Mudlay, Program Manager:** Tanusha was previously employed at Lancet Laboratories and the Medical Research Council of South Africa. Tanusha is based in Ibis' Johannesburg office.

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## Upcoming Events

### Forum 9 Annual Meeting: "Poverty, equity and health research"

**September 12-16, 2005: Mumbai, India**

The program will examine research needs and gaps and evidence-based policy options. The meeting will particularly highlight research to reduce inequities in health through effective action on the social determinants of health.

### 5<sup>th</sup> Biennial International Feminism(s) & Rhetoric(s) Conference

**October 5-8, 2005: Houghton, MI**

This is a bi-annual conference of the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition. Ibis Fellow Kimala Price will present a paper entitled, "What's in a Name? The Role of Metaphor in Reproductive Policy Discourse."

### SisterSong: Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective Annual Membership Meeting

**October 15-16, 2005: Oakland, CA**

This 2nd annual national membership meeting consists of workshops, strategy sessions, and live performances.

### 12th Priorities in Reproductive Health and HIV Conference partnering the 3rd South African Gender Based Violence and Health Conference

**October 16-21, 2005: Spier, Stellenbosch, South Africa**

This annual conference is recognized in Africa as one of the major platforms for the presentation of research undertaken in the region. Topics include HIV/AIDS, STIs, vaccines (HPV and HIV), microbicides, barrier methods, contraception, adolescent reproductive health, maternal

health, male involvement, gender-based violence, traditional practices, and genital tract cancers.

### 133<sup>rd</sup> American Public Health Association conference

**November 5-9, 2005: New Orleans, LA**

This annual meeting is the premier platform to share successes and failures, discover exceptional best practices and learn from expert colleagues and the latest research in the field. Several Ibis staff, fellows, and interns will be presenting research at the annual meeting.

### Reproductive Justice for All: A U.S. Policy Conference

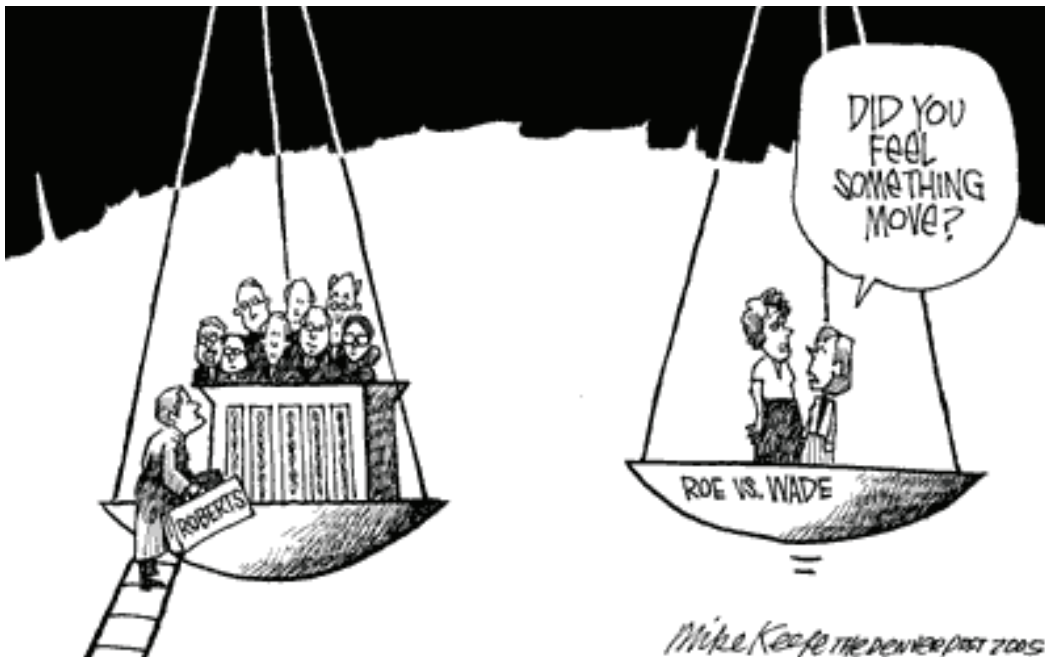
**November 10-13, 2005: Northampton, MA**

Sponsored by Planned Parenthood Federation of America and the Smith College Women's Studies Program, this national conference will discuss and design agendas for reproductive policies in the U.S. that advance social justice. Placing race, culture, sexuality, age and class at the center of a policy conversation about women's reproductive rights, the conference will consider a wide range of issues. Rachel Roth and UCSF-based Ibis Fellow Amy Schalet will make presentations on the rights of pregnant women and on the control of sexuality.

### Microbicides 2006 Conference

**April 23-26, 2006: Cape Town, South Africa**

The biannual international Microbicides Conference will provide updates on recent microbicide research, provide a forum for the discussion of new developments in microbicide research (including basic science, clinical, social science, behavioural, community and advocacy issues), and present opportunities for knowledge-sharing between microbicide researchers, public health workers, communities and advocacy organizations.



Mike Keefe, *The Denver Post*, 2005

To join the Ibis Reproductive Health mailing list, please email [admin@ibisreproductivehealth.org](mailto:admin@ibisreproductivehealth.org).

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