



December 2005 Newsletter

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December 1st is World AIDS Day

According to UNAIDS estimates, there are 38 million adults and 2.3 million children living with HIV, and during 2005 some 4.9 million people became newly infected with the virus. Approximately 95% of people with HIV/AIDS live in developing countries, but HIV today is a threat to men, women and children on all continents around the world.



Started in 1988, World AIDS Day is about increasing awareness, education and fighting prejudice. It is important in reminding people that HIV has not gone away, and that there are many things that still need to be done. This year's theme for the campaign is "Stop AIDS: Keep the Promise."

With infection rates continuing to rise there is a great deal still to do, so get involved! Visit www.avert.org/worldaid.htm today.

Massachusetts Legislature Increases Access to Emergency Contraception!

In September 2005 Massachusetts became the eighth state to allow pharmacists to dispense emergency contraception without a prescription. The Massachusetts legislature voted overwhelmingly to override Governor Romney's initial veto of the legislation. Women in Massachusetts will now be able to access emergency contraception (EC) from specially trained pharmacists who have prescribing agreements with physicians.

The bill also requires hospital emergency rooms to offer EC to sexual assault survivors. Despite EC's proven ability to prevent unintended pregnancies, many hospital emergency rooms do not inform sexual assault survivors about EC or provide them with the pills or even a prescription. A 2004 study by the Massachusetts EC Network and NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts found that 12 out of 71 of the state's hospital emergency rooms – or approximately one in six – do not provide EC to women who have been raped. EC has the potential to dramatically reduce the number of unintended pregnancies and abortions. Approximately half of all unplanned pregnancies in the U.S. result in abortion, and in Massachusetts 26,000 abortions were performed in 2001. *For more information about the Massachusetts EC Bill or general information about EC, visit www.massectnetwork.org.*

FDA Delays EC Decision Again: GAO Says Decision Not Based in Scientific Standards

Federal drug regulators compromised their usual science-based decision-making process when they ruled in 2004 against allowing emergency contraception (EC) to be sold without a prescription, Congressional investigators said. A detailed report from the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office (GAO) bolstered critics' charges that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) had yielded to political pressure from social conservatives who feared that easier access to the drug would encourage promiscuity. In an examination of the agency's 2004 decision, the GAO found that "four aspects of (the) review process were unusual" and that the entire decision-making process was "not typical" when compared to how similar cases have been handled."

The GAO's final report describes an appalling level of manipulation and suppression of the science," said Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Los Angeles, who requested the inquiry. "Despite overwhelming evidence that Plan B is safe and effective, politics trumped science in this case." GAO investigators also found that three separate FDA offices had recommended that Plan B be approved for sale without a prescription after reviewing data on safety and effectiveness. Two panels of outside advisers had reached the same conclusion at a joint meeting. *From the San Francisco Chronicle: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2005/11/15/MNGH3FOIEP1.DTL>*

Ibis Publishes English-Arabic Medication Abortion Guide

In October 2005, Ibis announced the publication of an Arabic-English bilingual guidebook, "Medication abortion: A guide for health professionals." This reader is designed to provide accurate information about medication abortion to researchers and health professionals including physicians, nurse practitioners, midwives, counselors, and health policy makers.

Medication abortion refers to a family of safe and effective methods for terminating an early pregnancy. The guidebook presents detailed information about the three regimens of medication abortion currently in practice: mifepristone/misoprostol, methotrexate/misoprostol, and misoprostol alone. The guidebook also provides information about the protocol, efficacy, eligibility, contraindications, side effects, and acceptability of each regimen and contains information about the legal status of abortion in the Middle East and North Africa.

The English and Arabic versions of the guidebook are available as separate PDFs on [our website](#), and at www.medicationabortion.com. Hardcopies can be requested from admin@ibisreproductivehealth.org.

FDA Proposes New Condom Labeling Guidelines

The US Food and Drug Administration has proposed changes to the existing labels for male condoms to provide more precise information on how well condoms work. Condom packages now generally note they are effective in reducing the chance of pregnancy and getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI), particularly HIV, from intercourse. Under the proposed new rules, condom packages would say that they are thought to be less effective against certain STIs, including herpes and human papilloma virus, because those diseases



can be transmitted through skin-to-skin contact in places not covered by a condom. In addition, labels for condoms with nonoxynol-9, which kills sperm, would include a recommendation that they should not be used by people at risk of HIV. The spermicide can irritate the vagina or rectum, potentially increasing the risk of HIV transmission. A 90-day comment period on the new rules started November 14, 2005. For more information, visit www.fda.gov/cdrh/comp/guidance/1548.html.

Pill Users Cross the US-Mexico Border

The circumstances under which oral contraceptives (OCs) may be sold to women varies considerably across countries. One of the main differences is whether a doctor's prescription is required before a woman can purchase OCs. In the US, hormonal contraceptives all require at least a healthcare provider's prescription if not a physical examination, which public health experts consider unjustified. Policy debate about relaxing the prescription requirement for OCs has focused on whether over-

Many American pill users actually obtain their supplies at pharmacies in Mexico, where pills are sold inexpensively over-the-counter.

the-counter access is safe and how it might influence use.

The University of Texas (UT) received funds from the National Institutes of Health to collect data along the US-Mexico border in one of the most porous and heavily traversed crossings in the world. Many American pill users actually obtain their supplies at pharmacies in Mexico, where pills are sold inexpensively over-the-counter. Ibis is working with colleagues at UT and the Population Council to study women's motivations for shopping in Mexican pharmacies, and investigate several other questions pertinent to the debate about the appropriate level of medical supervision for OC distribution.

Feminism(s) & Rhetoric(s) Conference

In October, the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition held its 5th Biennial Feminism(s) & Rhetoric(s) Conference in Houghton, Michigan. Founded in 1993, the Coalition is an interdisciplinary network of humanities and social science scholars and researchers who study rhetoric, literacy, communication and other linguistic practices of women across historical eras and racial, class and cultural lines. This year's conference theme was "Affirming Diversity" and Ibis fellow Kimala Price was a presenter on a panel discussing reproductive politics. In her paper entitled "What's In a Name? The Role of Metaphor in Reproductive Policy Discourse," Dr. Price discussed how policy debates regarding reproductive health issues often turn into arguments over the "appropriate" terminology to use when referring to the technology at hand and who has the proper authority to make such judgments.

Priorities in Reproductive Health & HIV Conference

The 12th Priorities in Reproductive Health and HIV Conference (partnering the Third South African Gender Based Violence and Health Conference) took place in October. Held in Stellenbosch, South Africa, this unique conference is recognized in Africa as being one of the major platforms for the presentation of research undertaken in the region. Topics include HIV/AIDS, STIs, vaccines, microbicides, barrier methods, contraception, abortion, adolescent reproductive health, maternal health, male involvement, gender and gender-based violence, traditional practices, and genital tract cancers. Several Ibis staff members attended and a few presented their work:

- Kelly Blanchard presented research on "A Comparison of Women's Providers' and Ultrasound Assessments of Pregnancy Duration Among Termination of Pregnancy Clients in South Africa."
- Ethel Qwana presented on "Providers' Knowledge Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Diaphragms in South Africa."
- Teresa Harrison shared a poster presentation on the "Quality of Information Available on the Internet about Cervical Barrier Methods."

For more information about the conference, go to www.rhru.co.za/site/PrioritiesConference/Priorities.htm

SisterSong Annual Meeting

In October, the SisterSong Women of Color for Reproductive Health Collective held its 2nd annual membership meeting in Oakland, CA. The collective, which has more than 72 member organizations (including Ibis) and 400 individual members, discussed a variety of reproductive justice and grassroots organizing issues in plenary sessions and workshops. The conference also featured the unveiling of the report, "A New Vision for Advancing Our Movement for Reproductive Health, Reproductive Rights and Reproductive Justice," produced by Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice, a founding member of SisterSong. The report outlines the reproductive justice framework which re-articulates reproductive rights within the context of human rights and other social justice issues such as economic justice, education, immigrant rights, environmental justice, sexual rights and globalization. For more information on SisterSong or the reproductive justice framework, to become a member or to get a copy of the current newsletter *Collective Voices*, visit its website www.sistersong.net.



Women, Action and Media Conference Save the Date

The 3rd Annual Women, Action and the Media Conference will be held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) March 31-April 2, 2006. The conference is organized by the Massachusetts-based Center for New Words, and co-sponsored by MIT's Program in Women's Studies. It will bring together journalists, authors, activists, bloggers, students, researchers and fed-up members of the general public to discuss and strategize on how to bring more progressive women's voices in the media in all of its various forms. Ibis fellow Kimala Price, who serves on two of the conference's organizing committees, will convene and moderate a panel on media coverage of women's health issues. To register visit www.centerfornewwords.org/wam.html

New Publications by Ibis Staff

- **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(2):91-97.
- Cooper D, Dickson K, **Blanchard K**, Cullingworth L, Mavimbela N, von Mollendorf C, van Bogaert L, Winikoff B. Medical Abortion: The Possibilities for Introduction in the Public Sector in South Africa. *Reproductive Health Matters* 2005;13(26):35-43.
- Lafaurie MM, **Grossman D**, Troncoso E, Billings D, Chavez S. Women's Perspectives on Medical Abortion in Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru: A Qualitative Study. *Reproductive Health Matters* 2005;13(26):75-83.
- **Matthews J**. Women-controlled Methods for Preventing HIV & Other Sexually Transmitted Infections. *Global Healthlink* 2005;135:8-9.
- **Roth R**. "Women's Rights Don't Stop at Jailhouse Door," *Women's eNews*, August 31, 2005.

To request any Ibis article, please email admin@ibisreproductivehealth.org.

Upcoming Events

[International Conference on HIV/AIDS and STIs in Africa](#)

December 4-9, 2005: Abuja, Nigeria

ICASA brings together African scientists, social leaders, political leaders and communities who share their experiences and current trends in the management of HIV/AIDS and STIs from an African perspective. The two-year period from one ICASA meeting to another is used by each country to hold regional conferences and workshops on HIV/AIDS and STIs.

[Population Association of America](#)

March 30-April 1, 2006: Los Angeles, CA

PAA members include demographers, sociologists, economists, public health professionals, and other individuals interested in research and education in the population. PAA is a nonprofit, scientific, professional organization established to promote the improvement, advancement and progress of the human race through research of problems related to human population. The PAA Annual Meeting provides a forum for the presentation of scientific papers, workshops, discussion groups and job opportunities.

[Women, Action and the Media \(WAM!\) Conference](#)

March 31-April 2, 2006: Cambridge, MA

Organized by the Massachusetts-based Center for New Words and co-sponsored by MIT's Program in Women's Studies, this conference will bring together journalists, authors, activists, bloggers, students, researchers and fed-up members of the general public to discuss and strategize on how to bring more progressive women's voices in the media in all of its various forms.

[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, behavioral, 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.