



The Female Health Foundation News – Issue #1 March 1, 2005

Welcome to the quarterly *Female Health Foundation News!* The Female Health Foundation, the not for profit arm of *The Female Health Company*, works with key stakeholders in individual countries to implement HIV/STD prevention/family planning/workplace programmes with an FC female condom component. This newsletter will disseminate information on these programmes as well as best practice materials, published research and impact data from around the world.

In this issue:

FHC and UNFPA Initiative

France plans a second national FC female condom campaign

The Ministry of Health for the Republic of South Africa re-confirms its commitment to the female condom

NGO AIDS Alive promotes FC in the townships of South Africa

SWAA Ghana (Society for Women and AIDS in Africa) distributes FC in the Accra region

FC Introduction in China

Adaptations of Eve Endler's The Vagina Monologues makes its debut in the northern Thai province of Chiang Rai

Research - Female Condom and Male Condom Failure among Women at high risk of STDs - Valappil, Kelaghan, Macaluso, Artz et al. Sexually Transmitted Diseases January 2005; 32(1): 35-43

FHC and UNFPA Initiative

Women and girls now represent half of all AIDS cases in the world and, in some areas, as much as 60% or more.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), which works to ensure universal access to reproductive health, has renewed its commitment to assure that FC is available to women across the globe. With FHC participation, UNFPA is leading an initiative to drive successful in-country programming efforts that support sustainable access and use of the only female-controlled barrier method.

Efforts are underway in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe with situation analyses being conducted in 16 pilot countries. Specific programming needs, key partner identification within the country, political and cultural environmental factors, distribution mechanisms and training needs are being evaluated.

UNFPA's collaborative approach assures that the final recommendations and global work plan are developed with the input and recommendations of all in-country partners. This shared participation and ownership for the initiative will facilitate final implementation — helping to achieve sustainability not only within the pilot programs but also in building a model for expansion across the developing world.

France plans a second national FC female condom campaign

Following on from their successful "1 FC 1 Euro" promotion in 2003, *SIDA Info Service* are planning a second phase of their national FC campaign. The 2003 campaign saw 100,000 FCs distributed in over 15,000 pharmacies across the country supported by media and training activities. 90% of the 100,000 FCs were sold within the first 3 weeks of the campaign. Sales of FC increased three fold in the commercial sector following the promotion and an evaluation study showed a good acceptance of FC by users. The campaign was also replicated in Guyana.

This year *SIDA Info Service* is shifting its focus to Family Planning and Health centres in an aim to actively engage health professionals in the promotion of FC. A cartoon style video and booklet will be produced for both providers and users and will be available in several languages to reflect the diverse client base of health centres. *SIDA Info Service* plans to launch the campaign in June 2005 and will evaluate its impact at the end of the year.

For more information on *SIDA Info Service* please visit:

<http://www.sida-info-service.org/index.php4>

The Ministry of Health for the Republic of South Africa re-confirms its commitment to the female condom

The government of South Africa recently re-confirmed its commitment to the female condom by not only bringing an increased number of female condoms into the country but also by initiating a revaluation and revamp of its original programme.

The National Department of Health in South Africa started the 'National Introduction of the Female Condom Programme' in June 1998. This programme entailed an introduction of FC at a provincial level in selected sites with facility baseline assessments, provider training, female condom (FC) distribution and monitoring, and programme supervision. The number of sites has grown over the intervening 7 years to 204.

A review of the original programme will now be completed with assistance from the Female Health Foundation. A full needs assessment of 30 sites will take place followed by the development of an action plan for each site. This action plan will guide what interventions will follow including: capacity building of systems for monitoring and evaluating female condom demand and use, a system of monitoring client use and effectiveness, setting up of cascade training, training and on-going support to staff in not only female condom promotion, but elimination of provider bias, and Monitoring & Evaluation completion. It is also expected that a further 5 sites will be added to the programme during this year.

This revision of such a long standing programme will provide an excellent model of intervention for other countries in the region. With the number of women infected with HIV/AIDS rising to nearly 60% of those infected in Sub-Saharan Africa such an initiative is more than timely and indicates the increased emphasis given to addressing HIV/AIDS prevention amongst women by the South African Government.

NGO AIDS Alive! promotes FC in the townships of South Africa

A newly founded NGO AIDS Alive! has started a unique approach to HIV/AIDS prevention work using the female condom. An exceptional feature of this group is their commitment to providing information and support not only on the prevention of transmission of HIV/AIDS but also of re-infection by those already infected. The NGO's members are all HIV positive women who live in a massive township on the outskirts of Cape Town, South Africa. The women provide a support group not only for their own members but also for the wider community. They promote knowing your status and ensure that no one known to them goes alone for HIV testing and receiving results. They share their experiences and provide support

to those newly knowing they are positive, helping them to tell family and friends and keep themselves healthy.

One main part of their mission is to promote healthy living and they work to spread the need for condom use amongst not only those who don't know their status but also those that do. With supplies of condoms from the provincial government these women traverse the townships promoting and educating about the need for protection against transmission and re-infection of HIV. Such health promotion messages have long been targeted at those who are not infected or who don't know their status, but little has been done for those that do and the crucial importance of not transmitting the virus further and not re-infecting those already infected. AIDS Alive members intend to develop their NGO further to reach other townships in the area and further around Western Cape Province and also to model and market their approach for others to replicate in and around Sub Saharan Africa.

SWAA Ghana (Society Women and AIDS in Africa) promotes FC in the Accra region

SWAA Ghana has recently received funding from the Ghana AIDS Commission to continue their FC promotion activities in the Greater Accra region. In the first phase of activities SWAA Ghana worked in one rural and urban area in 5 regions of the country. Although the main target group was women, the project sought to inform the Ghanaian population as a whole of the advantages of the female condom, emphasizing the dual role of the device as a barrier method against HIV/AIDS, STDs, and unwanted pregnancies. Strategies used to promote the FC included community sensitization workshops. A cascade training approach was adopted to increase capacity at a local level and around 1000 participants took part in these workshops, importantly with a high male involvement.

The second phase of this project will be a one year intensive promotion of the female condom in the Greater Accra region. Again a cascade training approach will be used and activities will be supported by a multi media campaign.

For more information on SWAA Ghana's activities please contact: swaaghana@hotmail.com

FC Introductions in China

While national HIV prevalence remains low in the world's most populous country, high clusters of prevalence exist, both geographically and among specific sub-groups, according to the recently released document: *A Joint Assessment of HIV/AIDS Prevention, Treatment and Care in China (2004), prepared by the State Council AIDS Working Committee Office and UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS in China.*

HIV prevalence is particularly high among sub-groups in some areas of Yunnan, Xinjiang and Henan and the epidemic is spreading into the general population. There is emerging evidence that the proportion of sexually transmitted HIV infections is increasing and the proportion of female HIV cases has increased considerably in recent years.

With the aim of delivering comprehensive and effective prevention programs that move towards 100% condom use, international organizations have introduced FC to high risk populations. Focusing on Yunnan and Sichuan - two of the hardest hit provinces - The Futures Group (TFG) has introduced FC to women working in the sex business in 4 prefectures. Preliminary data indicate that of a total of 44,748 coital acts were recorded during the study period, 82.88% of coital acts were protected by male condom and 13.25% by female condom, 3.86% were not protected. The percentage of protected sex acts increased by 9.44% compared to the baseline 'condom use rate with the last client'.

62.59% of respondents reported that they liked female condoms and 63.86% would continue to use female condom if available, 25% said it depended (on price, accessibility etc.). Only 3.65% would not use it any more.

Also in Yunnan province, Population Services International (PSI) has introduced the FC in Gejiu City, an area with high risk populations of sex workers and intravenous drug users. Working with a local Women's Wellness Centre and the Gejiu Red Cross, and in cooperation with Family Health International (FHI), PSI is training peer educators to introduce FC to sex workers as part of ongoing HIV prevention education. FC has been packaged as Hu Xiang Hao ("Good for you, Good for me"), in a discrete tissue pack with a calla lily flower symbolizing femininity.

PSI's work in Gejiu builds upon an earlier introduction of FC among Burmese and Yunnanese sex workers in the border town of Ruili. Working with the Women and Children's Development Centre (WDC), and using a model of cascade training, 200 sex workers were introduced to FC, and a supply of "FEEL" was maintained at the WDC centre and made available at a subsidized price. Early difficulties included lack of follow-up because the sex workers went "underground" due to a police crackdown. This may be able to be overcome in the future by increasing efforts with police advocacy and recruiting some FSW who may be willing to help the WDC "reach" the population while they are in hiding.

For more information please contact:

The Futures Group at futures1@51condom.com

Population Services International at ghafner@psichina.org

Adaptations of Eve Endsler's The Vagina Monologues makes its debut in the northern Thai province of Chiang Rai

Adaptations of Eve Endsler's The Vagina Monologues made its debut in the northern Thai province of Chiang Rai, as part of the Thai Women and HIV/AIDS Task Force (TWAT) series of activities to raise awareness of "women, our bodies, our pains and our gains, and our uniqueness, and our risks...."

Spearheaded in a community based theatre venue, the performance captivated the audience at the town's night market. In addition to the debut of the Monologues, TWAT's activities in northern Thailand in February included the workshop FC: Female Initiated Prevention Available NOW. A skills based introductory training was conducted by outreach staff from the Task Force, with support from FHF and Population Services International (PSI) Thailand.

More than 80 members of the Task Force will be involved in the development of an advocacy strategy to create awareness and support for the re-introduction of female condoms in Thailand. While a number of significant FC studies have been conducted in Thailand, a large scale program has yet to be introduced in the country. PSI Thailand expects to launch FC programs in 2005.

Female Condom and Male Condom Failure among Women at high risk of STDs

Valappil, Kelaghan, Macaluso, Artz et al. *Sexually Transmitted Diseases* January 2005; 32(1): 35-43

This research aimed to study the frequency and determinants of breakage and slippage during female and male condom use. A total of 869 women attending 2 sexually transmitted disease clinics used condoms over a period of 6 months. The main outcomes evaluated were breakage and slippage.

The authors conclude "...both female and male condoms were associated with low mechanical failure rates in this large observational study of women at high risk for STDs. Breakage was more common for the male condom ... and slippage was more common for the female condom". The study concluded that both condoms may provide good protection against STDs.

We welcome your input and contributions for future issues!

Correspondence can be addressed to info@femalehealthfoundation.org

Further information on FC female condom is available at www.femalehealth.com

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