

HIV VACCINE LESSONS

During the recent vaccine think tank, Professor Max Essex summarized lessons learned during nearly two decades of HIV vaccine research. Among the lessons he mentioned were:

- Research and development for an HIV vaccine cannot depend on the corporate sector, but must be encouraged by governmental and non-profit international bodies.
- Design guidelines for conventional vaccines, such as polio, are of little value in making a safe and efficacious HIV vaccine.
- Although low-efficacy vaccines—those with efficacy rates of 30 to 60 percent—are not a high priority for developed countries, they would still be valuable for high-incidence populations.
- Efficacy trials should take place in populations with the highest incidence, and the infrastructure and expertise in those locations must be developed.
- Vaccine designs should include viral subtypes that are prevalent in the populations targeted for efficacy trials.
- Any efficacious vaccines that are developed must be made available first to populations with the highest incidence, especially those who have contributed to vaccine development through participation in trials. ■



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Protecting Generations of Nigerians from HIV

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA IS HOME TO ONLY 10 percent of the world's population yet accounts for 72 percent of all people with HIV. Eighty percent of the world's HIV-infected women live there, as do 90 percent of all HIV-infected infants. Antiretroviral drugs are still largely unavailable on the continent, though, contributing to its especially high mortality rates from HIV. In fact, the epidemic has significantly reduced life expectancies in most sub-Saharan African countries.

It was with those alarming figures that Professor Max Essex, chair of the Harvard AIDS Institute, opened "HIV Vaccines for Developing Countries: Prospects for an HIV Vaccine for West Africa," a vaccine think tank co-sponsored by the Institute and APIN and held in Abuja in February. Professor Essex noted that the need for an HIV vaccine remains urgent. Vaccine design and trial design should be targeted toward Africa, he said, as should international

cooperation and capacity building. Africa, he added, should receive first access to any vaccines developed.

With more than 5 percent of the Nigerian population already infected with HIV, an effective vaccine is vital to the country's future, said Dr. Abdulsalami Nasidi, director of special projects at the Federal Ministry of Health. Nigeria's medical and scientific infrastructure confers a unique capacity for vaccine development, he said, adding that the country has two other essential elements for capacity building: a strong commitment from the President and a national HIV Preventive Vaccine Plan. This plan, which is modeled after the National ARV Committee, is aimed at developing vaccines that will be efficacious against the HIV subtypes circulating in Nigeria. The committee is responsible for vetting all HIV vaccine

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ABOVE: The future of Nigeria's children will depend on the development of a successful AIDS vaccine.



Participants of the Vaccine Think Tank

MEDIA TRAINING

With technical support and funding from APIN, Development Communications (Devcoms) Network has produced two manuals—*Reporting HIV/AIDS: A Manual for Training Journalists* and *A Journalist's Resource Guide*—as educational tools for journalists covering the epidemic in Nigeria. This spring, Devcoms began distributing the manuals during one-day AIDS seminars attended by nearly 90 journalists in Abuja and Lagos.

“Journalists play a critical role in promoting public awareness of AIDS,” says Mr. Akin Jimoh, program director of Devcoms. “The manuals are designed to help them understand and better report the complex issues surrounding the epidemic.”

For more information, contact Mr. Jimoh at devcoms@yahoo.com. ■

A NEW HOME

APIN recently relocated its coordinating office to Abuja, where Dr. Oluwale Odutolu will continue to serve as senior project coordinator. While APIN projects in the southwest will remain under the purview of Dr. Odutolu, Dr. Olumuyiwa Aina, a former APIN fellow, will manage the Ibadan office. ■

Protecting Generations, *continued*

trials, acting as a liaison to federal and state governments, and advising the Federal Ministry of Health on drug and vaccine approval.

In Abuja, Dr. Nasidi added, development of a vaccine research site continues. This site will conduct Phase I and II trials and will help build in-country experience. He pointed out the need to build additional capacity, to establish a national ethical committee that can regulate and approve all research involving human subjects, to strengthen the ethical committees of collaborating institutions, and to educate the community through awareness and advocacy programs using relevant stakeholders such as people with HIV and nongovernmental organizations.

Professor John Idoko, head of infectious disease at Jos University Teaching Hospital, discussed the challenges of vaccine trial recruitment. Preparation for vaccine trials, he said, requires a national vaccine plan, advocacy, political commitment, and community participation. Ethical, social, and cultural issues must be clearly discussed, and collaborations must be forged among national and international AIDS research programs, industry, and the community. Establishment of a vaccine site requires cohort development, a strengthened research infrastructure, personnel training, and solid clinical, laboratory, and data management practices.

The think tank also included discussion of other HIV-related topics relevant to the APIN program. International experts on antiretroviral therapy for HIV (Dr. Robert Murphy of Northwestern University and Professor Robert Redfield of the Institute of Human Virology); immunology (Dr. Philip Norris of Massachusetts General Hospital); and tuberculosis (Dr. Renee Ridzon of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) provided important state-of-the-art presentations. Progress in vaccine development in other African countries was reported by Professor Souleymane Mboup of Université Cheikh Anta Diop in Senegal; Dr. Coumba Touré of UNAIDS; and Dr. Merlin Robb of the U.S. Military HIV Research Program.

Professors Ayoade Oduola of the World Health Organization and Dyann Wirth of the Harvard School of Public Health detailed progress on malaria vaccine development.

During the closing session, Professor Phyllis Kanki, director of APIN, called for a concerted effort from all stakeholders toward successful vaccine development. She pointed out that efforts to develop a vaccine and set up vaccine trials are in line with APIN's objectives and noted that many of the think tank presentations showed that APIN has been able to carry out many preventive programs at the community level, in collaboration with research institutions, the federal government, and state governments.

Professor Lateef Salako, chief executive officer of the National Vaccine Production Laboratory in Lagos and co-chair of the think tank, reiterated the need to strengthen Nigeria's infrastructure and capacity for vaccine development and trials. He assured participants that with focus and concerted efforts from all sides, animal studies and Phase I, II, and III trials can all be conducted locally, and he urged proactive capacity development to begin right away. When an HIV vaccine becomes available, he added, it must be produced commercially in Africa, so Nigeria and Senegal, which have both been involved in commercial vaccine production in the past, should begin preparing for that time.

Professor Adetokunbo Lucas, adjunct professor of international health at the Harvard School of Public Health, restated the importance of involving developing country scientists in HIV vaccine development. He added that because antiretrovirals are still costly and cumbersome, a vaccine must be made more affordable, more efficacious, and easier to use. He also emphasized the need to intensify epidemiologic surveillance efforts in Africa to complement biomedical research, because, he said, “a magnet is very useful when searching for a needle in a haystack!”

A full report of the think tank can be found at www.apin.harvard.edu/news.html. ■

President Obasanjo Honored for Leadership

FOR MORE THAN TWO DECADES, IGNORANCE and denial have fueled the spread of HIV throughout the world. Countries have critically delayed responding to the epidemic, until beleaguered hospital wards, a succession of funerals, and a growing number of orphans have finally forced them to admit that HIV had woven itself into the very fabric of their own societies.

Since assuming the presidency of Nigeria in 1999, His Excellency Olusegun Obasanjo has fought both ignorance and denial by placing AIDS at the top of the national agenda. In early 2000, he established Nigeria's National Action Committee on AIDS to lead a broad-based and expanded response to the epidemic. The following spring, President Obasanjo became the first African leader to host the Organization of African Unity Summit on HIV and AIDS. In August 2001, while many heads of state remained in denial about the gravity of the epidemic, he urged the country's military commanders to provide their troops with free condoms to curb the spread of HIV.

In March 2002, President Obasanjo once again demonstrated the importance of leadership when he convened a national forum, "HIV/AIDS in Nigeria: The Road Ahead," which brought together major stakeholders in the fight against the epidemic, including government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, religious leaders, and donor agencies. He has supported and endorsed the work of APIN since its inception, and his open and frequent discussion of the epidemic has allowed numerous HIV prevention and research programs to flourish and obtain new funding from international aid agencies.

In February, at a special ceremony in Abuja, the Harvard AIDS Institute presented President Obasanjo with its annual AIDS Leadership Award for exceptional leadership in addressing the HIV crisis both in Nigeria and around the world. "The depth of President Obasanjo's commitment has awakened others to the urgency of the AIDS epidemic," said Professor

Max Essex, chair of the Institute. "The president's leadership in addressing the epidemic is truly remarkable, because he has consistently encouraged candid dialogue on HIV while working tirelessly to mobilize resources both in Nigeria and internationally."

Each year the Harvard AIDS Institute's International Advisory Council members join with senior faculty to select an internationally known figure who has displayed outstanding vision, leadership, and courage in the world's struggle



A GUIDING STAR: President Olusegun Obasanjo addressed more than 200 hundred dignitaries attending the AIDS Leadership Award Dinner.

against HIV. Past recipients have included Festus Gontebanye Mogae, president of Botswana; Richard Holbrooke, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations; Diana, Princess of Wales; actor Richard Gere; and tennis champion Arthur Ashe.

"I am especially honored to pay tribute to President Obasanjo," said Mr. Maurice Tempelman, co-chair of the Institute's International Advisory Council. "The president's outstanding work against AIDS has begun to change the lives of his citizens and the future of his nation. I appreciate the opportunity to salute him for his tireless dedication and to hope that his bold actions will truly inspire others to commit themselves to finding solutions that will change the course of this epidemic." ■

"Just as thunder is for the blind and lightning is for the deaf," declared Professor Adetokunbo Lucas, "so must people be educated about AIDS within their own context." Professor Lucas's remarks arose during the February meeting of the Advisory Council in Abuja, in a discussion about the assistance professional associations can offer APIN in tailoring educational messages to specific groups.

During the meeting, Council members also reviewed Phase II recommendations and discussed recent initiatives. And they cited the APIN-JUTH Laboratory, which was commissioned in December, as an inspiring example of the work that APIN is accomplishing in partnership with Nigerian practitioners. ■

INFORMATION EXCHANGE

The APIN-JUTH Laboratory's clinical, research, antiretroviral, and pediatrics teams hosted a group of U.S. and Senegalese collaborators in Jos to tour the laboratory, review its infrastructure, exchange information, and share experiences on anti-retroviral therapy procedures. Following the visit, the group traveled to Abuja to participate in the Vaccine Think Tank.

"It was great having all the visitors in Jos," said Professor John Idoko, principal investigator for the APIN project at JUTH. "They gave us a lot of encouragement and a bunch of new ideas for running the ARV clinic." ■

Banding Together on Policy

AN UNCONTROLLED EPIDEMIC OF HIV/AIDS would have devastating effects on health and economic development in Nigeria,” says Dr. Olusoji Adeyi, APIN’s associate technical director. “APIN is working with Nigerian institutions to build local capacity to formulate policies and strategies that are based, at least in part, on analyses and evidence of the level and dynamics of the epidemic, what works against HIV/AIDS, and the potential impact of the epidemic at the household, sectoral, and macro levels.”

As a result of a joint workshop held last October in Boston, APIN has developed a series of projects aimed at elucidating key areas affecting national AIDS policy. The five principal components of APIN’s Policy and Institutional Capacity Module will include: AIDS accounts, socioeconomic impact, and quality and resource requirements for large-scale antiretroviral treatment in Nigeria; gap analysis, training,

and evaluation follow-up; ethics; behavioral interventions; and the media.

Collaborative agreements and subcontracts have already been developed for the projects, which involve researchers from the University of Ibadan, the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER), and the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH). The projects’ management is based in Nigeria, with Harvard faculty members providing technical guidance. Professor Olu Ajakaiye, director general of NISER, coordinates the participation of the Nigerian experts and Professor Michael Reich of the Department of Population and International Health at HSPH coordinates input from Harvard faculty members.

“By working closely together and using sound analysis, we can strengthen Nigeria’s AIDS policy and management capacities and help ensure the effectiveness of programs and advocacy efforts,” says Professor Phyllis Kanki, director of APIN. “We look forward to our continued collaboration.” ■



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WELL-CHOSEN WORDS: One of APIN’s new policy module components is focusing on the media, which can offer critical modes of information about HIV.

NIGERIA AIDS Outlook

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