

# Penang Family Health Development Association



The Penang Family Planning Association (FPA) was registered on 16 January 1962. The first permanent clinic started operation in May 1966. The association set up a network of mobile clinics at the Municipal Council government clinic premises to provide much-needed family planning information and clinic services. By now, the services included: pregnancy tests, early detection of cancers via pap smears and breast examination, infertility/sub-fertility counselling, marital counselling, hormone replacement therapy, minor gynaecological treatment, medical camps and reproductive health advice to youths. Information, education and communication (IEC) activities have been an important aspect of the association's activities. Among some of the activities are: talks, video shows, exhibitions, planned parenthood courses, industrial nurses' update, male responsibility programmes, community development programmes, ante-natal programmes, satisfied acceptors courses and sexual and reproductive health information at an unwed mothers' shelter. We also run family counselling workshops for recovering drug-users and their families under programmes by the National Anti-Drug Agency.

FPA formed its own Women's Development Project (WDP) committee from 1984 to 1993. In 2002, it was revived by some enthusiastic members who went on to form the MAY (Me and You) Support Group (MSG). The MSG provides moral and emotional support for people living with HIV and AIDS and their families. In 2007, due to the increase in number of our MSG clients, the MAY Care drop-in Centre started operations with donation from Community Works and the Penang State government. Since 1989, the association has concentrated on HIV and AIDS work and from 1994, youth camps with HIV and AIDS components were funded by the then State Women's Consultative Council (HAWA) with occasional assistance by the Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC). The scope of the services and activities of the association went beyond family planning. In 2007, FPA officially changed its name to the Penang Family Health Development Association (Persatuan Perkembangan Kesihatan Keluarga, Pulau Pinang). The success of any organisation depends on adequate human and financial resources. PFHDA are very grateful that there are many donors who believe and have been giving the necessary funds to enable them to run their community services. Appreciation also goes to all the dedicated and committed doctors, volunteers and staff to keep the machinery going.

## The AIDS Gel: Sticky Solution to a Sticky Situation?

by Tim Patterson, School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine Tulane University

Researchers recently have announced the development and effectiveness of an AIDS-blocking vaginal gel, the first of its kind. From a clinical trial undertaken in South Africa, scientists have concluded that this gel, if applied correctly during sexual intercourse, cuts in half the chances of a woman to contract HIV.

Laced with the antiretroviral drug Tenofovir, the gel has been considered a breakthrough that sheds light on the future and our fight to stop the AIDS epidemic. As a microbicide, or a product that can be applied to the vagina or rectum with the intention of reducing the acquisition of STIs, the gel can be especially effective for women, who make up 60% of those infected with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa. The findings of the three-year study, completed by the Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research in South Africa, were presented in July at the XVIII International AIDS Conference in Vienna. If the results hold true, UN agencies reported they would assemble an expert consultation to discuss the next steps with the product.

The significance of this scientific breakthrough is underscored by the socio-economic factors which affect the decision that a sex worker has to make when selling sex. Sex workers in developing areas are constantly pressured into engaging in sexual intercourse without condoms. In order to please their clients and more importantly support themselves or their families, sex workers will forgo the condom which will then render their body vulnerable to potential STIs, including HIV. If they refuse to have intercourse without a condom, the client might move on to the next street corner, leaving the original sex worker without her payment.

This new gel provides an attractive option for women for two reasons. First, the original supply of gel is relatively cheap and affordable. The product could potentially be handed out free by local public health agencies, as they do with condoms. Second, the women can apply the gel without conferring with her partners or clients. Now she doesn't need permission to protect her own body, giving herself the empowerment she deserves. Previous prevention campaigns regarding HIV have not targeted women, a subgroup biologically vulnerable to infection. "We are giving hope to women," said Mr. Michel Sidibe, executive director of UNAIDS. "For the first time we have seen results for a woman-initiated and controlled HIV prevention option." The gel also effectively prevents the spread of HSV-2, the herpes virus that causes genital warts. Because other STIs compound the risk of transmitting HIV, this reduction also adds to the positive findings coming out of this report. Although promising, the results still need to be confirmed in another study. The official report lists inadequate adherence as the most serious challenge to obtaining an accurate estimate.

The observed level of how effective the gel really is depends on its ability to adhere and stick during intercourse and participants' willingness and ability to actually use the product. For example, the study cannot adequately measure if some contributor incorrectly applied the gel or lied about how many times they used it. Future trials will need to place greater emphasis on enhancing and objectively measuring adherence, in light of its substantial influence on the trial outcome.



A woman in the trial demonstrates the gel



A researcher runs test on the gel at the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative

## CALENDAR

**Life Sdn Bhd 5: I'm Posi+ive Goes to Johor**  
6 – 8 August 2010

ten Individuals  
ten true stories on Malaysians living with HIV



wisma IOTC, Johor Bahru

7 Aug @ 8.30pm | 8 Aug @ 3pm

9 Aug @ 8.30pm

For more information contact  
Shabana @ +603 40451033

## ADVOCACY MEETINGS

Exhibition at Monash University

Exhibition at University Malaya

“Seminar Menyambung Kasih Illahi, HIV/AIDS Bersama Ditangani & Pelancaran Buku Manual HIV & Islam” at Pusat Islam, Kuala Lumpur

For more information contact Guna @ +603 40451033

## MAF FUNDRAISING

Melinda Looi vibrant “Circle of Hope” design t-shirt for sale

For more information contact Shanthini @ + 603 40451033



T-Shirt RM40.00

Malaysian AIDS Council and Malaysian AIDS Foundation can now be followed on **twitter**  
[http://twitter.com/mac\\_maf](http://twitter.com/mac_maf)

## Penghargaan:

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