

## 4 IRMA's world tour: Key activities 2008–2010

### Summary

- IRMA maximises a range of innovative communications tools that allow researchers, advocates, policy makers, and funders from around the world to remain engaged in rectal microbicide (RM) advocacy.
- IRMA maintains a presence at key international events, to ensure greater visibility for RMs and the HIV prevention needs of people who engage in anal intercourse.
- Through a network of active members from around the world, IRMA ensures that stakeholders in all regions of the globe are engaged in moving forward the RM agenda.
- IRMA continues to promote the need to determine the safety of lubricants for rectal use.

### 4.1 Building and maintaining a global network: IRMA's cutting edge communications efforts

Since its founding in 2005 by four people in two countries, IRMA has faced the challenge of building a global network to connect researchers, advocates, policy makers, and funders. Facilitating communication with stakeholders across disciplines and time zones was, and remains, critical to building, nurturing, and maturing an advocacy movement. IRMA has made good use of a variety of communication tools to achieve this goal.

#### The Joy of Tech

IRMA relies on both traditional and cutting-edge technology to connect its members and create awareness, including the following:

- **Listserv:** IRMA maintains and moderates a highly utilised, interactive listserv on rectal microbicides (RMs). Many IRMA members have pointed out that this is the only space of its kind, where members can discuss and debate in real time a range of issues related to HIV prevention: vaginal and rectal microbicides, anal intercourse (AI) among women and gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM), pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), medical male circumcision, human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination, female condoms, efficacy, resistance, treatment as prevention, sexual lubricants, human rights, and more.

- **Teleconferences:** Regular global teleconferences feature leading RM researchers and advocates. For members unable to attend conferences and meetings in person, these teleconferences provide an invaluable opportunity to learn the latest developments from experts in the field. Nearly 500 people participated in the 15 teleconferences IRMA held in 2008 and 2009. Recordings and Power-Point presentations from the calls are available on the IRMA website.
- **Website:** IRMA maintains a resource-rich website, ([www.rectalmicrobicides.org](http://www.rectalmicrobicides.org)). The site received 6,906 visits from 5,228 unique visitors in 2009.
- **Blog:** IRMA has a very active blog ([www.irma-rectalmicrobicides.blogspot.com](http://www.irma-rectalmicrobicides.blogspot.com)) that can be followed directly on the blog site, via Facebook, and through a syndication service called Feedburner, among other means of accessibility. There have been 650 posts since the blog was launched in early 2008 (as of March 21, 2010) and it received 14,244 visits from 9,240 unique visitors in 2009 alone.
- **Social networking:** IRMA maintains a dynamic presence on the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter and on the photo-sharing site Flickr. In addition to information dissemination, these tools, including the blog and the website, personalise the movement by shining a spotlight on the faces behind the work. By early 2010, IRMA had over 335 members on its Facebook group and over 800 followers on Twitter.

**Over the past two years, IRMA has held 15 free global teleconferences addressing topics including the following:**

- The anal canal: An important transition zone for rectal microbicide development
- Epidemiology of HIV among MSM in Africa: Implications for rectal microbicides
- Efficacy and effectiveness—What is good enough? Who decides?
- Implications of anal intercourse and rectal use of products in vaginal microbicide trials
- Microbicides: The herstory of a movement
- Understanding the habits and preferences of people having anal sex: Implications for rectal microbicide development
- IRMA exclusive: A preview of new rectal microbicide safety studies
- The female condom: Where the girls—AND boys—are
- Modelling the impact of a rectal microbicide used by men who have sex with men in Lima, Peru and Bangalore, India
- What's in a name? Working with male-male sexualities, masculinities and genders in South Asia
- Women and anal sex: Yet another reason for rectal microbicide advocacy
- Successful implementation of HIV prevention trials in Peru

Check the IRMA blog ([www.irma-rectalmicrobicides.blogspot.com](http://www.irma-rectalmicrobicides.blogspot.com)), IRMA web site ([www.rectalmicrobicides.org](http://www.rectalmicrobicides.org)), or listserv (join at [rectalmicro@gmail.com](mailto:rectalmicro@gmail.com)) for information on upcoming calls.

Additionally, IRMA is a member of the Microbicides and Media and Communications Initiative, a resource offering the latest strategies and best practices for managing media coverage before, during, and after clinical trials.

From very modest origins, IRMA has become a forceful advocacy network currently consisting of over 850 researchers, advocates, policy makers, and funders in over 60 countries on six continents. This exponential growth, and the resulting expansion of awareness and interest in RMs, is due largely to IRMA's effective utilisation of electronic methods of communication. With few other resources, IRMA has used electronic communication tools to build and nurture a large, multinational advocacy network that is dynamic, engaging, and informative. These methods also support a central forum for exchange, debate, and networking and allow for the regular convening of diverse perspectives and scientific disciplines to improve understanding and action around RM research and development.

**The IRMA website includes a wealth of downloadable resources:**

- Information on upcoming teleconferences, as well as slides and MP3 recordings of past calls
- Slide sets from IRMA member presentations around the world
- IRMA-produced materials, including reports, a basic fact sheet, a customisable Power-Point presentation, and other awareness materials
- The "Meet a Friendly Rectal Microbicide Advocate" feature, where the biographies of dozens of advocates and researchers can be found, putting faces to names and personalising the work
- Information on the members who comprise the IRMA Steering Committee
- Links to papers, articles, reports, and other relevant resources
- A link to the webpage of IRMA-América Latina y el Caribe, featuring articles, presentations, and other resources in Spanish

Visit [www.rectalmicrobicides.org](http://www.rectalmicrobicides.org) early and often for all your rectal microbicide information needs!

## 4.2 Spotlight on IRMA's work at key international events

### 4.2.1 Delhi Direct

IRMA drew attention to RMs at the *Microbicides 2008 (M2008)* conference held in New Delhi, India in February of that year.



“That the sexual orientation of human beings can be defined as a sexual act is accepted as a given by both heterosexuals and homosexuals, either consciously or unconsciously. Undoing this belief is critical to making rectal microbicides available to all who need them.”

**Nesha Haniff**  
Academic, Advocate  
Kingston, Jamaica

amfAR–The Foundation for AIDS Research, the UCLA AIDS Institute, and the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine presented a Rectal Microbicides Update at a satellite symposium. The update had the following objectives:

- Provide an overview of recent advances in RM development;
- Discuss improvements in RM applicator design;
- Highlight the role of nonclinical studies in screening RM candidates; and,
- Underscore advocacy directed towards increasing funding for RMs.

Current IRMA members who presented their research included Drs. Alex Carballo-Diéguez, Ross Cranston, Charlene Dezzutti, and Ian McGowan. IRMA chair Jim Pickett discussed advocacy goals and objectives as well. The 2008 IRMA report *Less Silence, More Science: Advocacy to Make Rectal Microbicides a Reality* was released at this symposium.

IRMA members and others presented a popular training on media and communications skills called “The Media—Microbicide Friend or Foe” and held an informal social for members and allies in the Advocacy Corner.

PowerPoint presentations can be found here: [www.rectalmicrobicides.org/community.php](http://www.rectalmicrobicides.org/community.php). The IRMA report *Less Silence, More Science: Advocacy to Make Rectal Microbicides a Reality*, and a number of media stories highlighting IRMA's efforts at M2008 can be found here: [www.rectalmicrobicides.org/materials.php](http://www.rectalmicrobicides.org/materials.php).

The John Shaw Memorial Scholarship Fund created by IRMA provided partial support for nine international advocates to attend the conference.

### 4.2.2 Viva Mexico

Rectal microbicide research and advocacy—and IRMA—played prominent roles at the *17th International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2008)* held in Mexico City in August 2008.

IRMA presented at the pre-conference entitled “The Invisible Men: Gay Men and Other MSM in the Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic,” organised by the Global Forum for MSM and HIV. “Making Anal Sex Safer for MSM in the Developing World” featured IRMA Steering Committee members Jeremy Kwan (Malaysia), Olanrewaju Onigbogi (Nigeria), Jerome Galea (Peru), and Jim Pickett (U.S.).

The presentation is available here: [www.rectalmicrobicides.org/community.php](http://www.rectalmicrobicides.org/community.php).

Additionally, during this session IRMA released *Menos Silencio, Más Ciencia: Iniciativa para que los Microbicidas Rectales sean una Realidad*, the Spanish-language edition of its 2008 publication *Less Silence, More Science: Advocacy to Make Rectal Microbicides a Reality*. With growing awareness of the implications of AI on the epidemic in the global north and south, IRMA is using the Spanish edition to promote the research and development of RMs among the more than 300 million native Spanish speakers worldwide. The translation came about largely due to the efforts of IRMA-ALC (América Latina y el Caribe), IRMA's regional "sister" network based in Lima, Peru. IRMA-ALC focusses attention on RM advocacy and research efforts in Latin America and the Caribbean, and its vision is to be the principal promoter of RM research in the region.

Jerome Galea, an IRMA Steering Committee member based in Peru and a co-founder of IRMA-ALC, explained that "in all of Latin America and the Caribbean, there have been only two small studies involving microbicides, both for vaginal products. These studies represent important steps in microbicide research. However, in much of Latin America, HIV is transmitted by unprotected anal intercourse. We must press forward with advocacy and research to bring safe, effective, and acceptable rectal microbicides to the men and women who need them."

The Global Voice (La Voz Global), the official AIDS 2008 conference newspaper, covered IRMA's pre-conference workshop, reporting on the urgent need to develop RMs and commenting that "anal sex practices are widespread among the general population, making it strange that it is exclusively associated with male homosexual practices."

IRMA activities at AIDS 2008 were rounded out by poster presentations by IRMA and IRMA-ALC, advocacy activities in the Global Village, and a special dialogue with writer Elizabeth Pisani, (author of *The Wisdom of Whores: Bureaucrats, Brothels, and the Business of AIDS*) co-sponsored by IRMA and the Caucus for Evidence Based Prevention. As reported by Population Action International's Jennifer Johnson in the Caucus' daily conference newsletter, the dialogue was "a frank discussion among advocates, framed around Pisani's idea of the 'sacred cows of HIV.'"

In a conference highlight, Zeda Rosenberg, Chief Executive Officer of the International Partnership for Microbicides, publicly affirmed the need for RMs to a huge audience in the session "Vaccines and Microbicides: Where Do We Go from Here?" "Rectal microbicides are incredibly important and need to be developed," she said.

### 4.2.3 Mother City

In July of 2009, IRMA co-sponsored a special satellite session at the **5th International AIDS Society Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention** in Cape Town, South Africa—the first time this meeting dedicated an entire session to RMs. "Rectal Microbicide Development—An African Perspective" described the role of AI in HIV transmission and discussed recent research on developing RMs for the prevention of AI-associated HIV infection. Data from the African continent was highlighted. The presenters in the satellite session were Chris Beyrer (Professor of Epidemiology, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health), James McIntyre (Executive Director, Perinatal HIV Research Unit, University of the Witwatersrand and the Anova Health Institute), Ian McGowan (Professor of Medicine, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine), IRMA's Jim Pickett, and Sibongile Dladla (MSM Project Director, Perinatal HIV Research Unit, University of the Witwatersrand). The presenters spoke on a broad range of topics, including: epidemiology, lubricant availability among African MSM, accessing African MSM in health care and prevention studies, and an update on RM research, development, and advocacy.

PowerPoint presentations from the session are available here: [www.rectalmicrobicides.org/community.php](http://www.rectalmicrobicides.org/community.php).



"Being part of IRMA implies speaking up in each of our own ways about rectal microbicides. If you have the opportunity to speak, no matter how informally, give it a go! With IRMA's excellent library of resources, you can easily put together a professional presentation with slides that are up-to-date and easy to explain."

**Jerome Galea**

Advocate, IRMA Steering Committee Member, Founder IRMA-ALC Lima, Peru

*Nature Medicine* (August 2009) published an editorial on the proceedings. "The field is picking up momentum now," said McGowan in the article, indicating that a new phase of clinical trials was beginning. While these trials have created optimism in the field, "it's still not clear whether there's enough will from funders to do a full-scale efficacy trial for any rectal microbicide," said Robin Shattock, an immunologist at St. George's, University of London. "That's the biggest hurdle."

Satellite co-sponsors included AVAC—Global Advocacy for HIV Prevention, the Microbicide Trials Network, and Health4men, a gay men's health project in Cape Town.

### IRMA goes to Oxford!

In October 2009, IRMA Steering Committee member Jerome Galea was invited to present at a seminar series on evidence-based interventions at the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at Oxford University in the UK. Jerome focussed his presentation on current developments in the field, building his entire presentation around materials available on the IRMA website and adapting it as needed.

Visit the IRMA website at [www.rectalmicrobicides.org](http://www.rectalmicrobicides.org) for a wealth of resources you can use to initiate dialogue in your community.

Looking forward in 2010, IRMA is co-sponsoring "Be Heard!"—the Global Forum for MSM and HIV's pre-conference at the 18th International AIDS Conference in Vienna. Chair Jim Pickett will speak at the Australasian HIV/AIDS Conference in Sydney in October.

## 4.3 Act globally, think rectally

Beginning with four members in two countries, IRMA now has active members across the globe. This overview provides select snapshots of advocacy activities that have taken place in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Australia, Europe, and North America.

### 4.3.1 Africa

In Nigeria, initial RM activities actually pre-date IRMA. In 2004, Alliance Rights—an organisation serving as a voice for gay men and other MSM in Nigeria since 2001—took on the challenge of advocating for RMs. With support from the New HIV Vaccines and Microbicides Advocacy Society (NHVMAS), Alliance Rights organised a number of fora to discuss RMs and their relevance for Nigerians. These fora included events at the 2005 International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa (ICASA), and at the African AIDS Vaccine Programme (AAVP) stakeholders meeting convened in 2007 in Abuja, Nigeria.

Several Nigerian RM advocates attended the Microbicides 2008 international conference, including two advocates who were able to attend thanks to financial support from IRMA's John Shaw Memorial Scholarship Fund. Following the conference, a group of the Nigerian attendees formed a group called IRMA-Lagos. The group expanded in 2009 to become IRMA-Nigeria, with branches in Lagos and Ibadan. Its membership includes gay men and other MSM, sexual minorities, and HIV/AIDS researchers and advocates throughout Nigeria. IRMA-Nigeria educates the community about microbicide development efforts in order to ensure support for research, development, and future availability in Nigeria.

The Ibadan branch, based at the University College Hospital, includes public health physicians, researchers, and medical students and urges researchers from the HIV field to get more involved with microbicide research. Increasing the visibility of RMs within the university community, thereby making an impact on society at large, is the group's primary objective. IRMA-Ibadan encourages collaboration among its members to attract funding and to expand the research agenda in Nigerian universities, especially in the areas of planning and evaluation.

IRMA-Lagos organised a "sensitisation" event on microbicides with the goal of raising awareness about microbicides, including the need for RMs, and to encourage the participants to get involved in RM advocacy. Over 60 people attended, including members of an HIV support group, sex workers, and health workers. Organisers were quite encouraged to see that by the end of the event all the participants showed a level of understanding, and a majority of them joined IRMA-Nigeria. Photos from this event are available at: [www.irma-rectalmicrobicides.blogspot.com/2009/06/irma-nigeria-holds-microbicides.html](http://www.irma-rectalmicrobicides.blogspot.com/2009/06/irma-nigeria-holds-microbicides.html).

The success of IRMA-Nigeria is in part responsible for the large number of abstracts submitted from Nigeria for consideration at both Microbicides 2008 and Microbicides 2010, many of which focussed on microbicides in general and on RMs in particular.

Currently, IRMA's Steering Committee includes Community Vice-Chair Kadiri Audu of Lagos, and Dr. Olanrewaju (Lanre) Onigbogi of Ibadan.

*"Bearing in mind the ongoing work in this field and the enthusiasm of IRMA-Nigeria members, it is anticipated that the amount of high-quality work focussing on rectal microbicides research will increase. The group envisions a cohort of researchers and advocates who will come out of Nigeria and compete internationally to get funding for rectal microbicides research and advocacy."*

—Lanre Onigbogi, IRMA-Nigeria

In Kenya, IRMA activities have been incorporated into the work of Ishtar MSM, an organisation that promotes health and social well-being for gay men and other MSM. Through wellness workshops, open forum discussions, and outdoor activities, RMs are discussed as a possible new HIV prevention tool. Members of the community were especially interested in discussing a potentially expanded array of prevention tools after an acute shortage of lube led to a stagnation in prevention activities.

IRMA Steering Committee member Lourence Misedah has presented in different fora on the need for RMs as a new preventive measure and on the need for further research, including a consultation on gay men and other MSM held in Nairobi and hosted by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Peer educators, who play a big role in Ishtar MSM's outreach, also have advocated with a variety of stakeholders. Notably, with technical assistance from IRMA, they were able to provide input during the review of the Kenya National AIDS Strategic Plan, especially on the issue of access to existing HIV prevention tools. Ishtar MSM is now looking to expand RM-related activities to areas outside Nairobi.



Kadiri Audu





*“Despite living in a country where gay men and other MSM are included in the National AIDS Strategic Plan, it’s with deep sadness and pain that I still see a lack of programming on the ground to meet our prevention needs. As a result, there is an acute shortage of lubricants, for example. How long will we be in the shadows? There’s a need for innovative prevention measures for a healthier and safer tomorrow for gay men and other MSM in Kenya. The time to act is now! There’s hope in rectal microbicides.”*

—Lourence Misedah, Ishtar MSM (Kenya) and IRMA Steering Committee member

### 4.3.2 Australia

The HIV epidemic in Australia remains concentrated among gay men and other MSM, with unprotected AI among men the key factor associated with newly acquired HIV infections. While condom use remains generally high, and is indeed normative in many sexual contexts, there has been considerable discourse about the need for alternatives in a sustained safe sex culture. Studies report that in the absence of biomedical prevention tools some gay men and other MSM engage in harm reduction behaviours intended to decrease the need for condoms, such as negotiated safety, sero-adaptive techniques including strategic positioning (the practice of assuming the insertive or receptive position for anal sex based on serostatus), and consideration of clinical markers such as viral load.

The primacy of unprotected AI as the driver of the Australian epidemic means that a safe and effective RM would have considerable impact. Accordingly, RM research, development, and advocacy have been highlighted in several national and international events there.

In 2007, IRMA Steering Committee member Bridget Haire presented a general overview of the RM field at the Australian Microbicide Symposium, including the challenges of the rectal compartment compared to the vaginal compartment, the prevalence of anal sex in heterosexual as well as homosexual sex, and the role of advocacy in creating demand for a rectal product. This was followed up in July of the same year with a presentation by IRMA Scientific Vice-Chair Ian McGowan in Sydney at the International AIDS Society conference on HIV Pathogenesis and Prevention, featuring research on the investigational microbicide UC781, and a wealth of material on the processes of testing safety for rectal use. The role of RMs was discussed further at a community symposium convened by AVAC—Global Advocacy for HIV Prevention, held as part of the IAS meeting.

In 2008, RMs were on the agenda at the Australia Biomedical Prevention and Microbicides Symposium, which Haire helped to organise. With a focus on strategic issues within biomedical prevention, including the importance of establishing rectal safety of vaginal products, the meeting considered the role of anal sex in research aimed at heterosexual practices and the development of specific rectal products.

Through this period, the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) provided both cash and in-kind support to IRMA, through funding teleconferences and supporting staff to pursue IRMA-driven activities. The Global Campaign for Microbicides (GCM), a strong IRMA ally, also provided funding for both Australian Microbicide Symposia.

### 4.3.3 Europe

By mobilising its European partners and allies, including Steering Committee members, IRMA advocates for an increase in European-initiated funding and research for the development of RMs.

The United Kingdom has been most active in this regard. The UK Campaign for Microbicides—a partner of GCM—convened a Rectal Microbicides Working Group for two years. As noted in IRMA's last report, IRMA also worked with the Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) to address false RM claims from a UK-based lubricant manufacturer.

Before GCM had to close its European office because of funding cuts in 2009, it worked with IRMA and GCM partners in a dozen European countries to develop strategies on how to move forward a European RM agenda. However, once GCM offices closed, IRMA was left with limited capacity to continue this work. IRMA attempted to secure funding to convene a meeting of European donors, researchers, and advocates. However, no donor has yet stepped up to provide the necessary support for such a meeting.

In the meantime, IRMA Steering Committee members and allies continue to engage with key European partners in an effort to ensure that:

- A greater number of European advocates join RM advocacy efforts;
- A greater number of European researchers participate in RM research;
- Key European countries, institutions, and donors fund RM research and advocacy activities; and
- European stakeholders raise awareness of the need for more HIV prevention options, including RMs, for Europeans and for the women and men around the world who engage in anal sex.

### 4.3.4 Latin America and the Caribbean

IRMA's Latin American chapter, IRMA-ALC (IRMA-América Latina y el Caribe), was launched in 2008 by HIV prevention and treatment researchers and advocates (including IRMA Steering Committee members Jerome Galea and Dr. Jorge Sánchez) with the aim of promoting education and research efforts on RMs in Latin America and the Caribbean. Founding members represent the UCLA Program in Global Health-Latin America and Impacta Salud y Educación in Lima, Peru; Equidad in Guayaquil, Ecuador; and the Fundação Oswaldo Cruz in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

IRMA-ALC's first steps in advocacy included the launch of IRMA's report, *Less Silence, More Science: Advocacy to Make Rectal Microbicides a Reality* in Spanish. *Menos Silencio, Más Ciencia: Iniciativa para que los Microbicidas Rectales sean una Realidad* was released at AIDS 2008 in Mexico City. Concurrently, IRMA-ALC members continue to give various presentations to local organisations, universities, and professional groups about RMs, building awareness and stimulating interest in RM research and advocacy.

There are many unknowns regarding the acceptability and feasibility of conducting RM clinical trials in Latin America and the Caribbean and the subsequent introduction of a future product. It is unclear if existing data and experiences from the U.S. will translate to this region.

With minimal funding, IRMA-ALC members have taken steps to begin research efforts, laying the groundwork for larger investigations. To this end, IRMA-ALC members analysed the Latin American data from IRMA's global survey on the use of lubricants for anal sex (see *Less Silence, More Science: Advocacy to Make Rectal Microbicides a Reality* for a global overview of the survey results). The Latin American-specific data, highlighting lubricant use for anal sex and the potential acceptability of a future RM, were presented at Microbicides 2008 in New Delhi, at AIDS 2008 in Mexico City, and at the 2009 meeting of the International Society for Sexually Transmitted Disease Research in London.

In 2009–2010, the UCLA AIDS Institute and the UCLA Center for AIDS Research launched a RM study in IRMA-ALC's three founding countries of Peru, Ecuador, and Brazil. The study, entitled "Acceptability of Rectal Microbicides (RM): Barriers and facilitators of RM use among men who have sex with men in 4 South American cities," is the first of its kind in the region. The study will systematically explore acceptability among diverse populations, including sex workers, transgendered persons, and both gay and non-gay identified men who have sex with men. The project also will examine culture-specific customs, beliefs, and stigma related to anal sex. A total of 256 people will participate.



*"We hope that the data collected in this study will provide the foundation for a future, larger research agenda leading to the development of rectal microbicide clinical trials in the region, as well as expanded acceptability studies, which will be critical in preparing for adequate roll-out and dissemination of RM."*

—Jorge Sánchez, IRMA-ALC

In 2009, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine received funding from amfAR to develop a mathematical model that would estimate the impact of RMs in two cities: Bangalore, India and Lima, Peru. The influence of IRMA-ALC's work contributed to Lima being chosen as a site for this study. See Section 2.7.1 for a description.

### 4.3.5 United States

In 2008 and 2009, IRMA members presented on RM research and advocacy at venues throughout the United States, including the University of Illinois-Chicago, Philadelphia's annual Prevention Conference, the 2008 National Gay Men's Health Summit in Seattle, Chicago's 2009 National LGBTI Health Summit, and at events in Cleveland and Iowa among others. The Funders Concerned About AIDS featured IRMA's advocacy initiatives on one of its teleconferences.

A wide range of U.S.-based media outlets covered RMs as a result of IRMA's outreach, including stories on the websites RH-Reality Check, the Bilerico Project, Bloggernista, The Body.com, and AIDSmeds.com. Print outlets publishing articles on RM included the Windy City Times, Positively Aware, HIV Plus, and the Bay Area Reporter. In addition, articles in organisational newsletters published by Gay Men's Health Crisis and the National Association of State and Territorial AIDS Directors, among others, raised visibility on the field's progress. IRMA's Jim Pickett has made multiple guest appearances on popular podcasts such as Feast of Fun and the Windy City Queercast, using each appearance to raise RM visibility.

AIDS Foundation of Chicago (AFC), IRMA's secretariat, obtained ongoing support for programmatic activities from the Elton John AIDS Foundation and Broadway CARES/Equity Fights AIDS. Additionally, AFC secured resources for *Less Silence, More Science: Advocacy to Make Rectal Microbicides a Reality*—both financial and in-kind donations—from AIDS Action Foundation, The AIDS Institute, National AIDS Marathon Training Program—Chicago, AIDS Project of Los Angeles, AVAC, Alliance for Microbicide Development, amfAR, AFAO, Canadian AIDS Society, Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization Project, Fenway Community Health, GMHC, GCM, Housing Works, The Playboy Foundation, The SafeGuards Project/Family Planning Council, San Francisco AIDS Foundation, and the Stanley and Dorothy Winter Foundation of the Jewish Community Foundation.

## WORLD MAP HIGHLIGHTING KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS OVER THE PAST 2 YEARS

**US:** The world's first Phase I trial testing the rectal safety of a microbicide is completed in Los Angeles. A new Phase I trial launches, and another is scheduled to begin, in 2010.

**US:** IRMA raises the profile of RMs through presentations at local and national events, articles in print and electronic publications, and interviews on popular podcasts.

**Europe:** NGOs discuss strategies to increase European involvement in RM research, funding and advocacy efforts.

**Mexico:** IRMA presents on RMs at a meeting on gay men and other MSM.

**Peru, Brazil, Ecuador:** Launch of IRMA-América Latina y el Caribe, and a four-city RM acceptability study.

**Nigeria:** Launch of IRMA chapters in Lagos and Ibadan. Training fora are held. Researchers and advocates are encouraged to join RM efforts.

**South Africa:** IRMA co-sponsors a meeting on "Rectal Microbicides: An African Perspective."

**Kenya:** Peer educators from Ishtar MSM, an IRMA partner, advocate to include the prevention needs of MSM in the National AIDS Strategic Plan.

**Australia:** Two national microbicides symposia discuss RMs in the context of new prevention technologies.

**India:** Launch of IRMA report *Less Silence, More Science: Advocacy to Make Rectal Microbicides a Reality*.



## 4.4 IRMA's advocacy on the safety of lubricants used for anal sex

Many men and women use sexual lubricants during AI, yet we know very little about the relative safety of these lubes. Obtaining safety data on products used as sexual lubricants for anal sex would be valuable for public health reasons.

Accordingly, IRMA prioritises advocacy for data collection on the rectal safety of lubricants. Wholly absent in current HIV prevention activities, a translation of this type of data into useful information for users, funders, programme directors, and policy makers would be of significant benefit to the field. Lessons learned in this undertaking will also provide valuable insights into message development on the safety and efficacy of vaginal and rectal microbicides, when these products become available.

Due to the paucity of this type of information, IRMA launched a global web-based survey in 2007 (see an overview of the results from this survey in IRMA's previous report: *Less Silence, More Science: Advocacy to Make Rectal Microbicides a Reality*). The survey provided valuable information on lube use, preferences, and acceptability among nearly 9,000 men and women from over 100 countries, establishing a prioritised list of the most widely-used lubes to test for rectal safety.

A working group comprised of advocates and researchers was convened by IRMA to discuss the feasibility of testing sexual lubricants for rectal safety. While the working group identified significant scientific challenges that remain unaddressed to this day, there has been some progress (see Section 2.11 of this report for more information).

IRMA's action on lubricant safety includes the following activities:

- Encouraging researchers to test lubes for rectal safety and to share their findings;
- Facilitating dialogue among leading researchers and advocates within the working group on rectal safety of lubricants;
- Compiling articles and studies related to lube safety, particularly for rectal use, and maintaining an updated background document on this issue;
- Making IRMA's list of most widely-used lubes available to anyone interested in testing lubes; and
- Keeping IRMA membership updated on developments in this area.



Please join IRMA's growing network of engaged individuals and organisations. Help us expand awareness of the need for new prevention options for women and men around the world who engage in anal intercourse, and directly address the stigma and silence that continue to surround this human behaviour.

Visit [www.rectalmicrobicides.org](http://www.rectalmicrobicides.org) today for information on how to join.