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INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY OF
WOMEN LIVING WITH HIV

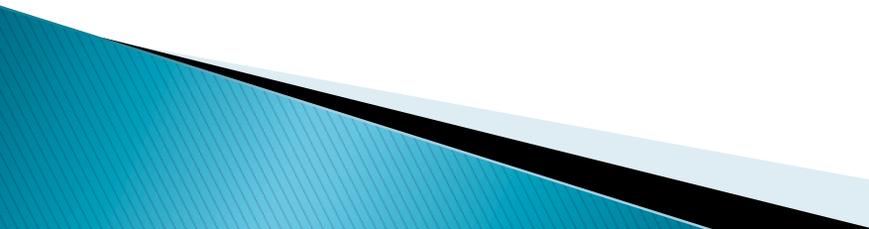
Advocates perspective of the possible relationship between HC and HIV

By Margaret Happy during the webinar held on May 17, 2016

Background

- Since the release of the findings of Heffron et al Study in October 2011, suggesting the possibility that progestogen-only contraceptives may increase risk of acquiring HIV; and
- WHO statement of February 2012 which stated that “because of the inconclusive nature of the body of evidence on possible increased risk of HIV acquisition, women using progestogen-only injectable contraception should be strongly advised to also always use condoms, male or female, and other HIV preventive measures.

Background cont'd

- ▶ **Raised concern among:**
 - **HIV prevention advocates,**
 - **Reproductive health service providers, and**
 - **Women living with HIV,**
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Why HC–HIV raised concern

- ▶ **HC-HIV is a critical issue which raises a particular concern among the advocates because:**
 - Current data leaves unanswered questions about the link between hormonal contraceptives and women’s risk of acquiring HIV
 - There are countries especially in Sub Saharan Africa where women have a high lifetime risk of acquiring HIV;
 - Where hormonal contraceptives especially progestogen–only injectable methods constitute a large proportion of all modern methods used; and
 - Where maternal mortality rates remain high.

Why HC–HIV raised concern

- **HC–HIV is an equity issue. Women in sub-Saharan Africa have the right to a wider array of safe, long-acting family planning methods that address concerns about HIV prevention and preventing unintended pregnancies.**
- **Lack of options in health facilities**
- **Women are not ready to be divided by issues of various risks of maternal mortality and HIV infection. We cannot accept an either/ or approach. Both issues need to be addressed.**

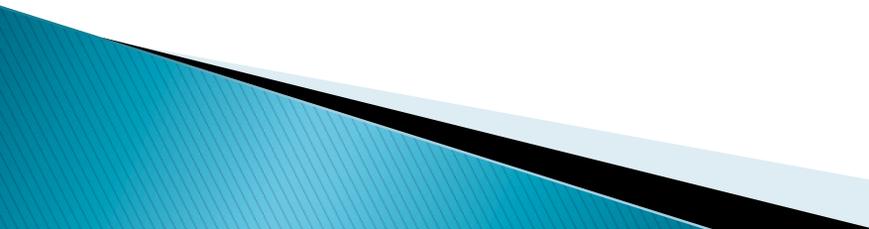
Why HC–HIV raised concern

- No clear communication strategy for service providers, women, policy makers and other stakeholders on risks and benefits, known and unknown
 - Women are not provided with accurate and up to–date information to help them make the right decision and informed choices
 - Limited involvement of women in discussions and decision–making about this critical issue (HC–HIV).
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Actions undertaken so far

- ▶ Through the coordination of the International Community of Women Living with HIV Eastern Africa and the Global Advocacy for HIV Prevention, the following actions were undertaken:
 - Pan African Women meeting on HC–HIV was convened. Women reviewed and discussed the existing data on hormonal contraceptive use and HIV risk in January 2012
 - The recommendations from Pan African Women meeting were presented during WHO Technical Review meeting in February 2012.

Actions undertaken by advocates

- ▶ **Advocates disseminated widely the WHO Technical statement on Medical Eligibility Criteria on HC**
 - ▶ **Advocates issued a statement asking WHO to take the lead in setting next steps on hormonal contraceptive use.**
 - ▶ **When the Technical statement was released, it was circulated widely through the several list serves that we are subscribed to.**
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Actions undertaken in response

- ▶ Carried out consultation with key service providers of FP in Uganda with the view of understanding their perspectives of the WHO Recommendation on Hormonal contraceptives and HIV risk and the implication to policy and programming.
 - Although, they were aware about the findings and WHO MEC, all did not change their way of working
 - Had no intention of communicating the HIV risk to women using depo because they claimed it would cause many women to abandon the method

Actions undertaken continued

- ▶ The think–tank meeting was convened on HC, HIV and Advocacy
- ▶ Created a platform through which advocates engage in the discussions and conversation on HC HIV updates
- ▶ Engaged in several webinars and meetings on this critical issue
- ▶ Engaged in calling for investing in research – ECHO trial
- ▶ Engaged in the ECHO trial processes
- ▶ Analyzed the WHO MEC of October 2015 reacted

Why is Strategic Communication Framework for Hormonal Contraceptive Methods and Potential HIV-Related Risks important

- ▶ **It is important because it acts on one of the recommendations that were made during the Pan African Women meeting in January 2012. Women called for a clear communication strategy for service providers, women, policy makers and other stakeholders including information on the risks and benefits, known and unknown data**

Importance cont'd

- ▶ **helps stakeholders to understand the evidence base on different methods of hormonal contraception and their relationship with various HIV-related risks**
 - ▶ **It provides guidance to countries to contextualize the evidence within broader sexual and reproductive health programming principles**
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Importance cont'd and Recommendation

- ▶ It provides guidance for adapting the Strategic Communication Framework to develop a country-specific strategy

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ WHO and UNAIDS should ensure that women are involved in an on-going manner in discussions, communication strategies and decisions about next steps to act on this critical issue.
Participating in a single meeting is insufficient

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THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING.