

# Challenges

durex<sup>®</sup> network - Raising awareness of sexual health across the globe  
Issue 3, 2010

## International AIDS Conference Review

The 2010 International AIDS Conference took place in July, with delegates coming from all over the world to hear the latest developments in HIV/AIDS, discuss ways forward and identify new strategies

Among the themes that developed during the week were finance, human rights and treatment.

There was also a focus on prevention both within the conference and outside in the Global Village area which was open to the general public.

### Finance

Money was obviously on everyone's mind in the light of the difficult global economic situation and fears that budgets would have to be cut. This was brought home in particular during two sessions on the same day from former US President Bill Clinton and Microsoft founder Bill Gates.

Both men are closely acquainted with the current AIDS programmes through their charitable support for HIV projects and each expressed the view that money was an issue.

Bill Gates called for a focus on initiatives that are known to work. He commented: "Right now there isn't enough money to simply treat our way out of this epidemic. If we keep spending our resources in exactly the same way we do today, we will fall further behind in our ability to treat everyone."

He gave examples of male circumcision and also the use of short courses of drugs that, if given to mothers and their newborn

babies, prevent the child becoming infected as two programmes that were inexpensive and effective.

Bill Clinton called for better use of the funds that are available and wanted less money spent on bureaucracy, unnecessary trips and unread reports.

He said: "In too many countries, too much money pays for too many people to go to too many meetings and get on too many airplanes to do too much technical assistance... Every dollar we waste a day puts a life at risk."

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Bill Clinton (photo - IAS/Marcus Rose/Workers' Photos)

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AIDS 2010 Chair Julio Montaner and Bill Gates (photo - IAS/Steve Forrest/Workers' Photos)

### Human Rights

This was one of the main focuses of the conference, and there was a human rights march through the city to call for human rights as a fundamental component of efforts to prevent new infections and provide treatment for people living with HIV.

The conference also issued the Vienna Declaration. The document calls for governments to re-think their policies on illicit drugs to take account of scientific evidence and improve community health and safety.



Demonstrators took to the streets of Vienna to call for human rights (photo - IAS/Steve Forrest/Workers' Photos)

The document says that the current policies - where illicit drug users are criminalised - are helping to fuel the HIV epidemic and have resulted in negative health consequences. By the end of the conference, more than 12,000 people had signed the declaration.

### Treatment

The executive director of UNAIDS, Mr Michel Sidibé spoke on the urgency for a

new approach to antiretroviral treatment, and introduced Treatment 2.0.

"Treatment 2.0 radically simplifies treatment to maximize the number of people who can benefit. This will save more money. But in the end, we will only be measured by the number of lives we save," he said.

Treatment 2.0 includes:

- A once-daily fixed dose combination treatment that is less toxic, easier for compliance and requires less laboratory and clinical support
- Maximising access to treatment
- Reduction in costs of treatment
- Increased testing to ensure early diagnosis and early commencement of treatment
- Involving the community in managing treatment to encourage adherence and improve programme access.



The Condomize message was incorporated into the Global Village opening ceremony celebrations (photo - IAS/Marcus Rose/Workers' Photos)

### Prevention

The conference heard about potential future approaches through the findings of the CAPRISA trial of a microbicide on nearly 900 women in South Africa. The trial found that those containing an experimental vaginal gel using an anti-HIV drug had a 39 per cent lower chance of becoming infected by the virus than those receiving a placebo.

There was also a major condom awareness campaign run throughout the conference week, called Condomize. The campaign donated a million condoms during the week to delegates and also to the people of Vienna. There were also displays in the conference's Global

Village, explaining condom use and raising condom awareness.

The highlight of the week was the Condomize party, where 3,000 conference-goers and members of the public gathered to dance the night away.



UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé (left) with Kgalema Motlanthe, Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa (photo - IAS/Steve Forrest/Workers' Photos)

### Finally

The closing ceremonies featured video links from US President Barack Obama and Nobel peace laureate Desmond Tutu of South Africa.



A busy scene at the Condomize Zone (photo - IAS/Marcus Rose/Workers' Photos)

President Obama pledged to redouble efforts to fight HIV and AIDS through his Global Health Initiative, despite dealing with economic hard times in the wake of a global recession and said that their focus was on a broad, sustainable and effective approach to the global epidemic.

Desmond Tutu commented that HIV prevention, treatment, care and support are a human rights priority and that to deny treatment is to deny life itself. ■

# Young people's false belief in HIV immunity

The government in the Philippines has joined with UNICEF to tackle the high level of ignorance about HIV/AIDS among the country's young people.

Recent findings of the Department of Health's AIDS Registry revealed that infections among Filipinos aged 15-24 increased five-fold in just two years from 41 in 2007 to 218 in 2009.

A factor behind this increase is believed to be a basic lack of knowledge. In a 2003 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality survey, almost three-quarters of those interviewed (73 per cent) thought they were immune to HIV, while 28 per cent believed that AIDS is curable.

In response, an interactive video has been launched that is aimed at helping high school students to learn the truth about risky sexual behaviour.

The video – entitled *Power of You* – follows the story of two typical teenagers as they face daily challenges and decisions. Being interactive, it allows users to choose

the path their characters will take and carries the message for young people that they should delay their sexual debut and educate themselves and their peers about HIV and STIs.

UNICEF representative Vanessa Tobin explained: "Young people learn things

better if information is presented to them in a novel and exciting way, and *Power of You* does just that.

"It is designed to raise awareness of STIs and HIV among young people in a fun and interactive light. It motivates them to choose life-saving actions and focuses on the power of individual choice to make their dreams and ambitions come true."

The campaign is being initially piloted in 29 schools across the country and is targeted at reaching at least 12,000 high school students in its first year.

Dr. Lolita Andrada, director of the government's Bureau of Secondary Education, said teachers were being encouraged to integrate programmes like *Power of You* into their school improvement plans.

"We want to foster an environment of openness wherein young people can talk about the problems that they typically encounter as they go about teenage life," she said. ■



The new campaign is aimed at Filipino pupils

## Sexual tree to grow condom use in Sweden

A campaign to halve the number of new HIV infections in Sweden by 2016 is promoting an interactive website for adults to create their 'sexual tree'.

By charting their sexual history, the website emphasises to people that when they have unprotected sex with a new partner, then the new partner is effectively having sex with all of their ex-partners as well.

In a newspaper article to launch the new campaign, Christer Wennerholm, head of the National Council for Coordination of HIV Prevention, and Health Minister Maria Larsson said although it is commonly presumed that young Swedes are well informed about HIV and the spread of STIs, the reality is very different.

"In many ways, we have in our country all the necessary information to live a healthy life with low risk of disease," they wrote in the Dagens Nyheter daily.

"But there is often a gap between what we know and what we do, and the gap is large when it applies to the risk of sexually transmitted infections."

They made reference to a National Board of Health and Welfare study which found in an online poll of 4,714 Swedes aged 15-24 that only around half of the respondents who reported having casual sex said they always used a condom.

"Only 51 per cent of girls and 56 per cent of guys aged 15-19 consider it obvious to

use a condom with a casual partner," they commented.

"That the young people would rather risk contracting a sexually transmitted disease than abstain from sex when they don't have a condom shows that more work in changing such attitudes is necessary."

Last year, Sweden recorded 468 HIV infections and almost 38,000 chlamydia diagnoses.

"The question is how many young people will get HIV and how many will become infertile [as a result of chlamydia infection] before using a condom becomes obvious with new partners," Wennerholm and Larsson concluded. ■

# Growing Restless

**Restless Development – formerly known as Students Partnership Worldwide – is a youth-led development agency which trains young people to make a change in deprived communities across the world. Challenges spoke to Restless Development’s chief executive, Eric Levine, about the organisation’s re-branding and the work it continues to carry out across the world in areas such as sexual and reproductive health and education**

This is a very important year for Eric Levine. Not only is 2010 the 25th anniversary of Students Partnership Worldwide – the not-for-profit organisation of which he is chief executive – but it also marks the year that the organisation is benefiting from the most comprehensive re-branding in its history.

As of July 2010 the organisation will be known as Restless Development – The Youth-led Development Agency, and it is a change that Eric thinks is long overdue.

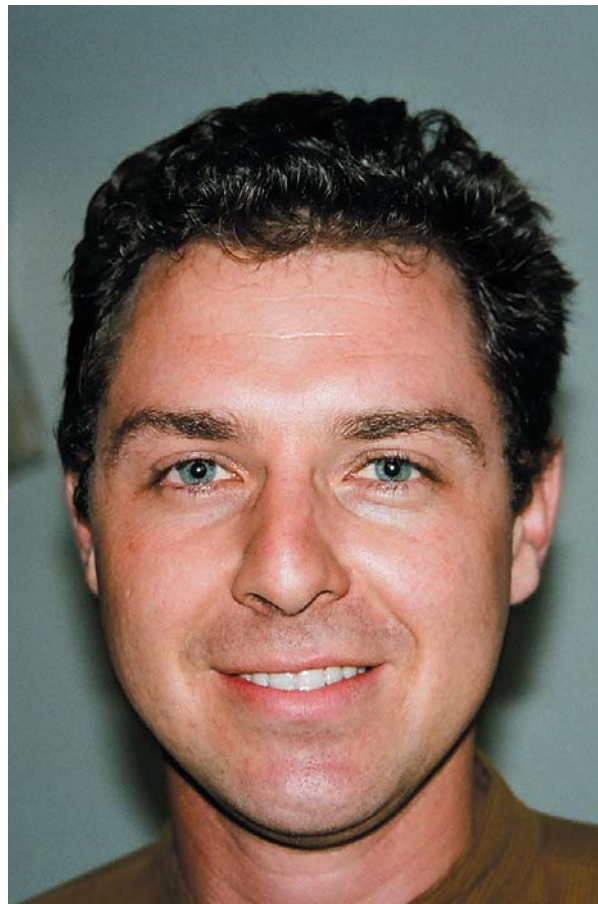
“SPW has grown and evolved massively since it was formed a quarter of a century ago,” says Eric, who took over as the boss at the beginning of 2005.

“In the last five years or so we have increased the value of projects we work on from £1.5 million to £5 million, the number of staff has doubled from 100 to 200, and our direct engagement with youth has grown from 200,000 to 500,000 in structured weekly activities.”

But despite the organisation’s development and its success in making a difference to underserved communities across the globe, Eric and his team weren’t convinced that the traditional SPW branding effectively captured their growing ambitions.

“The organisation was originally formed in 1985 as a British gap year charity,” he says. “Whilst Students Partnership Worldwide was suitable to begin with, we realised a few years ago that this name and branding led some people to perceive our work as amateurish, and didn’t truly reflect the unique youth-led professionalism of the organisation.

“All of our work is fundamentally aiming to reshape perceptions of what young people



*Restless Development’s Eric Levine*

and young professionals are capable of, and we needed a name and brand that put this front and centre.”

The decision was taken to re-brand SPW and the organisation’s new identity – Restless Development – was developed for launch in July 2010.

“I really believe that Restless Development strikes a perfect balance between passion and professionalism, whilst at the same time making a powerful statement about the restless energy of young people and the need to engage with them to address the most pressing issues we are facing globally,” adds Eric. “We want to be positioned as the youth-led development agency, and the new branding offers a strong and unique identity

for us to grow into as a global leader in the coming years.”

Branding aside, the organisation has come a long way in its 25 year history. But the core principles of Restless Development remain the same.

Youth to youth education is still at the heart of Restless Development’s ideology, with the organisation recruiting and training 18 to 28-year-olds to serve as Volunteer Peer Educators (VPEs) in countries across sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. The VPEs live full-time in rural communities and use interactive education methods such as music, drama and dance to engage young people and address issues including HIV/AIDS, sexual and reproductive health and the environment.

Today Restless Development has more than 1,000 VPEs – 90 per cent of whom are local and working in their own countries – with a smaller number of VPEs from Europe, North America and Australia filling specific complementary roles. The average age of VPEs is 21 years old, whilst the 200 full-time professional staff average 25 years, and the senior management 33.

But despite its young personnel, Eric is very proud of the professional standards which Restless Development’s staff and VPEs deliver in all of their work.

“Our field staff in each country visit and assess all placements prior to VPEs being deployed,” he says. “During their placements VPEs are visited monthly by staff to assess progress. The staff also observe the VPEs delivering different components of the programme, providing feedback and training to ensure the highest quality of delivery.”

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So where does Eric see Restless Development heading in the future?

"I really want us to become the banner-carrying organisation that brings credibility to the youth-led sector," says the 35-year-old. "And if we continue to be a professional, evidence based organisation then there's no reason we can't achieve this."

Restless Development currently has full-time offices in 11 countries but works in partnership with various organisations in another 30. And Eric, who lives in London but is originally from San Francisco, is keen to continue the sensible and sustainable expansion of the organisation.

"We are open to moving to new countries. Half of the world's population are young people, and a lot of governments and civil society organisations are realising that for development to work, they need to work effectively with and for young people, which is creating a strong demand for our expertise," he says.

"We've already begun providing technical support and training in countries around the world, and this is likely to continue to grow as part of our work. That being said, we would only set up a full-time office somewhere if we were confident we would have at least five years to demonstrate the impact of our work."

"Our overall mission is to reshape the role of young people in society and develop the next generation of values based leaders. Restless Development already has 15,000 alumni, and I would absolutely love to see some of these people coming into positions of influence so they can make a positive difference for young people in the years ahead."

In October and November this year Restless Development will be launching its new Global Strategy for 2011 to 2015, as well as celebrating its 25th anniversary. ■

For more information visit [www.restlessdevelopment.org](http://www.restlessdevelopment.org)

## The right medium for the message

### Young Americans are being inspired to get themselves checked for sexually transmitted infections in a language they understand

Rather than just being lectured at by well-meaning but remote clinicians, the sexual health message is coming to young people in the United States from the renowned television network MTV.

The GYT (Get Yourself Tested) campaign has been launched after statistics revealed that half of the estimated 19 million STIs occurring in the USA each year are among those aged under-25 – which coincides with the MTV target audience.

"We're committed to partnering with our audience to reversing the course of the rising national STI trends," said MTV general manager Stephen Friedman.

"GYT connects with young people everywhere they are and prompts them to take control of their sexual health, arming them with tools that make it easier to talk openly about testing and take action to know their status."

MTV has been involved in previous sexual health-related promotions and this new campaign has been launched in partnership with the Kaiser Family Foundation, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA), among others.

In order to reach as many young people as possible, GYT is being rolled out through a series of new initiatives – on-air, online, on mobiles, and on the ground at college

campuses – as well as in more than 4,000 health centres and clinics across the country.

Among its special promotions is a 'campus challenge' which encourages students to pledge publicly on social networking sites that they will be getting tested. The colleges that get most involved will be awarded prizes including free concerts and a chance to enter sweepstakes for the MTV Movie Awards.

Tina Hoff of the Kaiser Family Foundation commented: "We have found that entertainment media partnerships can be a powerful force for change. By working with this coalition of partners with a common goal and a targeted message, we hope to reduce the spread of STIs among young people by normalising communication and testing." ■



*The campaign is reaching its target audience online*

# Homophobia threatens HIV prevention

Gay and bisexual men in a number of African countries are too afraid of discrimination to seek help or advice about HIV/AIDS



A crowd gathers outside the Kenya Medical Research Institute HIV/AIDS clinic (Photo – BBC World Service)

Speaking on the 2010 International Day Against Homophobia in May this year, UNAIDS executive director Michel Sidibé urged all governments to take steps to eliminate stigma and discrimination faced by men who have sex with men.

“They must create social and legal environments that ensure respect for human rights and enable universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support,” he said.

According to UNAIDS figures, between 5-10 per cent of HIV infections worldwide are estimated to occur through sex between men, although this figure varies considerably from country to country.

Yet men who have sex with men (MSM) continue to face discrimination from healthcare workers, other service providers, employers and police.

The difficulties that such men currently face in countries across Africa have recently been reported by amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research.

The amfAR MSM Initiative has highlighted the wave of homophobic rhetoric and violence that is undermining efforts to combat high rates of HIV/AIDS among the MSM sector of the population.

Human rights activists, AIDS advocates and grassroots MSM organisations say that progress made over the past several years is being threatened by a new climate of fear and repression.

This has particularly been seen in countries such as Uganda, where although same-sex sexual behaviour has long been outlawed, the ‘war’ against homosexuality has taken on a new dimension.

A new law proposed in Uganda is aimed at bringing in the death penalty for “aggravated homosexuality”, which includes any same-sex sexual activity by HIV-positive people.

It not only mandates up to life imprisonment for anyone convicted of such acts, but would also imprison anyone who knows of homosexual conduct and fails to report it – which would effectively

criminalise the efforts of those providing HIV/AIDS services to members of the MSM community.

Pepe Julian Onziema, the HIV/AIDS programme coordinator at Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), explained that providing HIV services has become nearly impossible.

“We are referring our clients to doctors who had agreed to help us, but they’re finding it difficult to continue because they are afraid something will happen to their jobs,” he told the MSM Initiative.

“One doctor still manages to get us condoms, which we are able to distribute through our men’s organisation. But we are limited in the number of people we are able to reach.”

If the new law is passed, Onziema acknowledges that his organisation will be unable to continue working openly with members of the gay community. “We will be forced underground, and that will only increase cases of abuse and HIV infection.”

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Similar problems are reported in Kenya, where a mob of several hundred men attacked an HIV/AIDS clinic run by the Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) in the coastal town of Mtwapa, near Mombasa. This had followed a rumour that two local men were planning to hold a wedding ceremony there.

HIV/AIDS services in the area have since ground to a halt, said Peter Njane, director of the amfAR-funded group Ishtar MSM. "People used to get their antiretrovirals at KEMRI. While it's been closed, there is no provision of condoms and lubricant; no medical services for this community.

"Some of the men who were attacked are not sure they will be able to go back to work as peer educators. And we are hearing from other AIDS organisations in the area that people are afraid to come to their office for meetings."

One of UNAIDS' ten priority areas in the Joint Outcome Framework for 2009-2011 is the removal of punitive laws, policies,

practices, stigma and discrimination that block effective responses to AIDS.

Another key priority of the Framework is to empower men who have sex with men, sex workers and transgender people to protect themselves from HIV infection and to fully access antiretroviral therapy.

Unfortunately, as the amfAR MSM Initiative reports, there is still a long way to go to meet these priorities. And it is not only in African countries that such homophobia is affecting HIV/AIDS services to those in need.

Although many Latin American countries boast socially advanced legislation when it comes to defending sexual freedom and orientation, the lingering "machismo" which breeds prejudice and discrimination is continuing to flourish across Central and South America.

The stigma attached to same-sex relations in the region is complicating the task of slowing the spread of HIV, made worse by

the fact that sex between men is a leading mode of HIV transmission.

In its 2008 report to the UN General Assembly on the state of the HIV epidemic, Brazil stated that men who have sex with men are eleven-times more likely to be HIV positive than the population as a whole.

And the impacts of these high rates extend beyond the men themselves. A Health Ministry study in Peru, for example, found that most women who get infected by the virus get it from men who have had a gay relationship.

Yet spending on HIV prevention among MSM in Latin America is proportionally very low. According to UNAIDS, less than ten per cent of the money spent on prevention goes into campaigns specifically aimed at MSM.

MSM is not something that governments in the region choose to make a lot of noise about. In most countries and by many institutions, it is just not seen as a political gain. ■

## A mother's death is the greatest loss

A study by researchers from Oxford University has found that the death of a mother from HIV/AIDS has a more profound long-term effect on children than the loss of a father

The results have come as a surprise as many believed that losing the male breadwinner would have greater consequences because of the economic impact for the family.

It is estimated that 15 million young people have lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS and the study was based on the lives of more than 700 children in Kagera, Tanzania, from the early 1990s to 2004.

Stefan Dercon, professor of development economics at Oxford, explained: "Our interest was in trying to start to look at the longer term impacts of what's been happening with the HIV/AIDS crisis.

"The impacts of losing a mother were substantially higher and statistically much more significant than anything we could pin down in losing the father in the family.

"We could establish that children who lost their mother before the age of 15 had



*A mother's death is the greatest loss for a child (Photo – BBC World Service)*

typically a year less schooling compared to children who didn't experience these kind of events during their childhood. They were also two centimetres shorter than otherwise similar children.

"Given that average schooling is only about five or five and a half years, that's a substantially lower level on average for children who've lost their mothers.

"Similarly, two centimetres is actually quite substantial. I was told not so long ago that it is more or less equivalent to the height gain that was obtained in the U.S. over a 50 year period during the 20th Century. So these are quite big differences."

The findings, he said, highlight the central role that a mother plays in mediating what's happening in the family and pinpoint how HIV/AIDS has created a generation of children, who may be "disadvantaged for the rest of their lives." ■

# Syphilis returns to China

Despite being nearly eradicated in China during the 1950s, syphilis has become widespread once again

Syphilis is now the most commonly reported sexually transmitted infection in Shanghai, China's largest city, and the numbers continue to rise.

All across China, an average of one infant with congenital syphilis was born every hour in 2008, an increase by a factor of 12 over the previous five years.

In a report published in the New England Journal of Medicine, authors Joseph Tucker, Xiang-Sheng Chen and Rosanna Peeling say that the infection has fast become the "major scourge" of China as the country rapidly ascends to the status of a global economic powerhouse.

China's economic expansion is believed to be a factor. The growing number of Chinese businessmen with money and of young women in poverty has translated into inflated levels of demand and supply for the country's commercial sex industry.

At the same time, men who have sex with men are also disproportionately bearing the burden of the syphilis epidemic. And in China, at least one third of men who have same-sex relationships are also married.

Syphilis can be successfully treated with antibiotics, however many people never experience symptoms and so are not diagnosed. If left untreated, syphilis can cause neurological problems and death.

"The limited data that are available suggest that fear of being identified as a 'social deviant' may steer members of the

marginalised groups away from official STI clinics," the report explains.

The World Health Organization estimates that 12 million people worldwide acquire syphilis each year, affecting about two million pregnancies.



Buildings are rising high in China – but so are rates of STIs (photo UNESCO/Roni Amelan)

About 25 per cent of those pregnancies result in miscarriages or stillbirths, while 25 per cent of infants who survive are born underweight or with serious infections. Syphilis in newborns also can lead to deafness and bone deformities.

China is not alone in seeing an increase in the incidence of syphilis. Infections are also on the rise in the United States, where again it was all but eliminated ten years ago.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in April that the number of infants born with syphilis rose from eight to 10 cases per 100,000 live births from 2005 to 2008. ■

## Conferences and events

### 26th National Conference of Sexology

**Date:** 3 September 2010

**Location:** Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

**Key theme:** "Sexology for Sexual Health" – using a multi-disciplinary approach, the scientific programme will encompass the advances that have globally revolutionized the management of sexual problems in men and women.

**Contact:** [www.sexconindia.com](http://www.sexconindia.com)

### 3rd Access to Healthcare in Africa Conference

**Date:** 6-7 October 2010

**Location:** Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa

**Key theme:** Changing treatment guidelines: meeting new challenges to quality, access and care for HIV & AIDS, TB and malaria in Africa.

**Contact:** [www.aa4a.co.za](http://www.aa4a.co.za)

### 3rd Botswana International HIV Conference

**Date:** 13-6 October 2010

**Location:** Gaborone, Botswana

**Key theme:** Examining the tough choices towards positive changes for a sustainable future.

**Contact:**

[www.nope.or.ke/inside.php?id=33&parent=33](http://www.nope.or.ke/inside.php?id=33&parent=33)

### 2010 Australasian Sexual Health Conference

**Date:** 18-20 October 2010

**Location:** Sydney, Australia

**Key theme:** Proposed topics include marginalised populations - migrants and refugees - risky behaviour and adolescent sexual health. The conference will run back-to-back with the Australasian HIV/AIDS Conference 2010 from 20-22 October.

**Contact:**

[www.sexualhealthconference.com.au](http://www.sexualhealthconference.com.au)

### 7th World Congress on Men's Health

**Date:** 28-30 October 2010

**Location:** Nice, France

**Key theme:** Men's health: how to overcome the challenges – one-stop for comprehensive multidisciplinary scientific exchange and solutions. Topics include sexual medicine, public health and education.

**Contact:** [www.wcmh.info](http://www.wcmh.info)

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