

# The WIHS Woman



## The Connie Wofsy Women's HIV Study

### Men's AIDS Cohort Study MACS/WIHS Executive Committee Meeting

By Linda Scott – NCAB Representative

During the last week of May, Sheila and I were at the Men's AIDS Cohort Study (MACS)/WIHS executive committee meeting. It was a whirlwind of information and excitement for me, since this was my first conference. There were many interesting topics covered, including HIV and aging, drug use and disease progression, HAART, and helping women in Rwanda. Many of the other WIHS sites are planning fundraising activities for the efforts and women in Rwanda. Only those with the most advanced disease progression are currently able to receive treatment from RWISE, (the Rwanda WIHS). These women have been through some of the most unspeakable, inhumane treatment imaginable. Now most are single mothers who are barely able to provide a single meal a day for their family. They are lacking in knowledge

and ability to fight the disease on their own and have no funds for basic medical treatment. The compensation they receive from a single RWISE visit is 1/4 the average monthly income. If anyone is interested in helping or has an idea on how to help, please bring your ideas to the next CAB meeting on July 13th.

Another interesting part of the conference was sitting in on the executive meeting and seeing what is going on from the other side of the table. Many folks are working on getting grants renewed and to analyze data to support their research ideas. One of the biggest obstacles mentioned was that study participants may not always give samples or show for appointments. Remember, the study is about us, for us, and cannot continue without us. Full participation is essential for the studies to get a real understanding of what is happening with each and every participant. Make sure they are able to take full consideration of you and your unique circumstances by showing up for all your appointments provide any samples you can, and answering all of the questionnaires. Together, we can make them see all the parts of the big picture!

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## Doing Our Part To Help Women Around the World



By Sheila Bryant

At the NCAB meeting, not only did we talk about issues dealing with HIV/AIDS in the United States, but we also talked about what we could do to influence international policy. We talked about the next frontier in HIV/AIDS research - microbicides. Currently, researchers are studying the effectiveness of microbicides (a gel, cream or suppository that can kill viruses and bacteria) as a method to reduce or prevent the transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STDs). The development of effective microbicides is so important since this would provide a method of protection that women can control, unlike male condoms. This is especially important in places like Africa, where women are not always in positions to negotiate safer sex methods with their partners. To ensure that efforts continue to develop an effective microbicide, each NCAB member was asked to send in a letter to their State Senator (in my case that is Senator Dianne Feinstein). In this letter, we ask them to support the Microbicide Development Act, which calls for increased funding and commitment from the United States government towards the international efforts to develop an effective microbicide. Although I sent only one letter, I know that my letter is one of many that will be sent to Senators around the country. I pray that our voices will be heard, and together we will make a difference.

## A Wonderful Evening at the U.S. Botanical Garden



By Sheila Bryant

Linda and I attended a WIHS reception at the beautiful United States Botanical Garden located on the great mall in Washington D.C. At this gathering, we were able to spend some quality time with the WIHS scientists, while enjoying the beautiful garden. I was amazed at how many different types of flowers there were! There were gardenias, lilies, and cacti from places like South America, Japan, and Africa. My personal favorite was the lilies; they were gorgeous! They even arranged the flowers so beautifully around our appetizers! It all looked like the cover of a Better Homes and Garden magazine! On our greenhouse walk, we learned about all the generous people who had donated their time and money to maintain the garden. It was a perfect evening!



**The U.S. Botanic Garden Conservatory.**

## CAB CORNER



### WIHS Spring CAB Meeting a Success!

By Michelle Barry

At our last Community Advisory Board (CAB) meeting in March, some of our participants got a chance to learn more about cardiovascular (heart and blood vessel) disease and Hepatitis C infection, while enjoying a delicious lunch buffet. Participants were also able to meet our two new NCAB representatives, Daniela and Linda, and one of our WIHS investigators, Dr. Phyllis Tien.

Both Daniela and Linda introduced themselves and spoke briefly about their plans for attending upcoming CAB conferences. Daniela mentioned the HIV/AIDS Conference in Oakland that she and Sheila were going to attend in April. She also gave out information on options for attending the conference free of charge. We also talked about the big National CAB/Executive Committee Meeting that Linda and Sheila would attend in the Washington D.C. area (see articles submitted by Linda and Sheila on their experiences at the May conference in this issue!). We had a great discussion on how the CAB is a valuable resource for learning more about the WIHS study and your bodies. These quarterly CAB meetings are a great opportunity for WIHS participants to learn more about your bodies and to understand why we do the things we do in the WIHS. As CAB representatives, Daniela, Linda, and Sheila serve as advocates for the WIHS participants and relay information that they learn at the big WIHS conferences to you.

After we talked about what the CAB is all about, Dr. Tien spoke about risk factors for cardiovascular disease and the new Cardiovascular disease (CVD) Study at the Veteran's Administration (VA) Hospital in San Francisco. We learned about the purpose of the CVD study and what sorts of things WIHS investigators are studying. Since Dr. Tien also heads a liver study, we talked a little bit about liver biopsies (when a small mass or lump of tissue is removed for analysis). One of the women at the meeting, who had a liver biopsy, shared her experience with the others. The WIHS women asked a lot of great questions and learned a lot about the WIHS and their bodies.

Finally, we talked about our plans for our next CAB meeting in the summer. The WIHS women all agreed that they wanted to learn more on the topic of nutrition. So come to our next CAB meeting on July 13 in San Francisco to enjoy a delicious meal and to meet other fabulous WIHS women. You will also get a chance to hear our CAB representatives tell us about what they learned at the conferences. Also, find out more about nutrition: ways to gain weight, ways to lose weight, smart food choices for women, and more! (Check out the invitation included in this newsletter!)



## Summaries of Publications Generated from WIHS Results

By Michelle Barry

All of you have volunteered so much time to help advance our knowledge on HIV in women. Because of this, we are learning more and more about how the virus particularly affects women. The following are summaries of a few findings that have been generated over the past year from the WIHS.

### **Fat Distribution in HIV-Infected Women in the United States**

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Do you remember the old metabolic toxicity study that we did out at the San Francisco General Hospital? In this study, WIHS women had DEXA scans performed on them. A DEXA scan requires a person to lie very still on a table while a machine scans her body from head to toe. It gives you a measurement of your body fat. In this study, we found that a majority of the women, both HIV-positive and HIV-negative, were overweight. As studies on men have concluded, we found that leg fat is lower in HIV-infected women who are taking HIV medicines compared to HIV-negative women and HIV-positive women not on medicines.

### **Hormonal Contraceptive Use and the Effectiveness of Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy**

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In this study, WIHS investigators were interested in seeing whether or not hormonal birth control affects how women's bodies respond to their HIV medicines. We studied a group of WIHS participants on HIV medicines and compared those who were also on birth control to those not on birth control. Results from

this study indicate that hormonal birth control appears to have no effect (positive or negative) on the effectiveness of HIV medicines in women.

### **Sex and the Course of HIV Infection in the Pre- and Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy Eras**

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In this journal article, the authors analyzed several studies looking at the potential differences between how HIV effects men's and women's bodies. Based on the results of these studies, the authors found that there appears to be little, if no difference, in the rate of HIV disease progression between men and women. These studies also showed no harmful effects of pregnancy on HIV disease progression in women. Several studies concluded that during the first years of their HIV infection, women tend to have higher CD4+ cell (T-cell) counts and lower HIV RNA levels, compared to men. This may cause women to delay starting their HIV medicines. As new HIV medicines are developed, the authors stressed the importance of studying the differences in how women and men's bodies react to these HIV medicines.

### **Effects of Bacterial Vaginosis and Other Genital Infections on the Natural History of Human Papillomavirus Infection in HIV-1-Infected and High-Risk HIV-1-Uninfected Women**

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This study looked at the potential effects of other vaginal infections on a woman's likelihood of having a new Human papillomavirus (HPV) infection. HPV is a sexually transmitted virus that causes cervical cancer. Pap smears are a way of screening to see if a woman has been infected with HPV. Two particular infections were of interest: bacterial

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vaginosis (BV) and *Trichomonas vaginalis*, also known as trich. A woman gets BV when an imbalance of bacteria occurs in her vagina; it is when the harmful bacteria outnumber the “good” bacteria. A woman who has BV may notice a fishy odor in her vaginal discharge. Trich is a parasite that can live in the vagina. Women with trich may experience itchiness and discomfort around her vagina. Results from this study show that having BV and trich may increase a woman’s likelihood of having a new HPV infection. These findings stress the importance of maintaining good vaginal health to avoid the risk of HPV and cervical cancer.



## Welcome to the WIHS Family

### Welcome Trista !

Hello All! My name is Trista A. Goldstein and I am a Women's Health/ OB/GYN Nurse Practitioner new to the WIHS family of practitioners. I am very happy to be a part of this on-going and important study. The route that has lead me here has been a circuitous one, but wonderful. I started off as an English teacher, graduating from Clark University in 1990 (I'm old!). Half way through the school year though, I felt I had a calling to nursing, and so applied and got into New York University's Bachelor's of Science in Nursing program. I graduated from there in 1994, knowing that I wanted my career path to go in the direction of Women's Health in one capacity or another. So the next year, I started NYU's Master of Arts in Midwifery program. I graduated from that program in 1998. I realized almost at once that being a midwife was a wonderful job, but not quite what I was looking for, and so switched to Women's Health/ OB/GYN Nurse Practitioner (thankfully I did-

n't need to go back to school for that! Whew!). Since then, I have held various jobs within Women's Health, including working in the reproductive endocrinology area, and simple OB/GYN private practices and clinics, and research programs where I wrote grants and initiated research. Then, purely by accident, I applied for and got a career changing position at the University of Southern California. There, I worked 70% as a clinical health care provider to HIV+ women and a majority of my time was dedicated to working with HIV+ pregnant women. In the past 7 or more years, USC's Maternal-Child and Adolescent Program can say that it has had zero mothers to baby HIV transmission, and I was very proud to be a part of the team that continues that record. The rest of my work schedule (30%) at USC included working on and with various research protocols. While working at USC, I realized that I had finally found my niche: Women's Health and HIV. I was planning on staying at USC, but my husband got transferred to San Francisco, so with our two-month-old baby girl, Mia Devi, and dog in tow, we moved to the Bay Area in February. Once here, Dr. Alice Stek, with whom I worked at USC, put me in touch with the fabulous team at UCSF, and the rest is 'herstory'. I am thrilled to have the opportunity to continue working with this population, and now to work with such great practitioners who truly are wise, WIHS women!

### Welcome Karen !

My name is Karen Kavanagh, and I started with WIHS the first of June. I am a Research Coordinator in the East Bay, so I will be doing interviews and blood draws and I will be calling you to schedule your study appointments. Before starting with the WIHS I was working at Planned Parenthood in Concord as the Pre-

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natal Clinic Manager. I almost completed 8 years there. Before Planned Parenthood I was in the Peace Corps in Honduras for two years. This is where I learned my Spanish, and survival skills. And, I learned how to read for hours in a hammock. But also, I taught lay Health Care Providers and Midwives to help better serve their community. In addition, I taught women and teens regarding HIV/AIDS. At Planned Parenthood I also acted as an HIV testing counselor. But my first experience with HIV education was at U.C. Davis as a "Peer Counselor in Sexuality", where I received my B.S. in Human Development and a Minor in Women Studies. I am so grateful to have this opportunity to be part of this amazing study, and so appreciative of everyone's kind guidance and training.



## Photographs from the CAB Meeting held at Highland Hospital in Oakland



## Cat's Dream

By Pablo Neruda



How nicely a cat sleeps,  
sleeps with its paws and its gravity,  
sleeps with its cruel claws,  
and with its sanguinary blood,  
sleeps with all the rings  
which, like burnt circles,  
compose the geology  
of a tail the color of sand.

I would like to sleep like a cat  
with all the hairs of time,  
with the tongue of flint,  
with the dry sex of fire  
and after speaking with no one  
to stretch myself over the whole world,  
over the roof tiles and the ground,  
intensely determined  
to go hunting the rats of dream.

I have seen how the cat as it slept  
would undulate: the night  
flowed in it like dark water,  
and at times it was going to fall,  
maybe it was going to plunge  
into the naked snowdrifts,  
or it grew so much as it slept  
like a tiger's great grandfather  
that it overleapt in the darkness  
roofs, clouds, and volcanoes.

Sleep, sleep, nocturnal cat,  
with ceremonies of a bishop  
and your mustache of stone:  
supervise all our dreams,  
manage the darkness  
of our slumbered powers  
with your sanguinary heart  
and the long collar of your tail.

## Sueño de gatos

By Pablo Neruda



Qué bonito duerme un gato,  
duerme con patas y peso,  
duerme con sus crueles uñas,  
y con su sangre sanguinaria,  
duerme con todos los anillos  
que como círculos quemados  
construyeron la geología  
de una cola color de arena.

Quisiera dormir como un gato  
con todos los pelos del tiempo,  
con la lengua del pedernal,  
con el sexo seco del fuego  
y después de no hablar con nadie,  
tenderme sobre todo el mundo,  
sobre las tejas y la tierra  
intensemente dirigido  
a cazar las ratas del sueño.

He visto cómo ondulaba,  
durmiendo, el gato: corría  
la noche en él como agua oscura  
y a veces se iba a caer,  
se iba tal vez a despeñar  
en los desnudos ventisqueros,  
tal vez crecía tanto durmiendo  
como un bisabuelo de tigre  
y saltaría en las tinieblas  
tejados, nubes y volcanes.

Duerme, duerme, gato nocturno  
con tus ceremonias de obispo,  
y tu bigote de piedra:  
ordena todos nuestros sueños,  
dirige la oscuridad  
de nuestras dormidas proezas  
con tu corazón sanguinario  
y el largo quello de tu cola.

