

# tagupdate

NEWS ON TAG'S PROGRESS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST AIDS

## TAG Sponsors "Cure Meeting"

Scientists, funders, and activists meet in Washington, D.C., to speed research to eradicate or permanently deactivate HIV in the body.

In November 2008, Treatment Action Group, the Foundation for AIDS Research, and the FAIR Foundation sponsored a long-overdue meeting of leading scientists in Washington, D.C., to discuss the possible avenues—and impediments—to finding a way to eliminate or cause the long-term remission of HIV in the body. Among the sponsors, the Workshop on Eliminating Viral Persistence and Eradicating HIV Infection was informally known as the "Cure Meeting."

Finding a cure for HIV has taken a backseat to efforts to develop treatments and ways to prevent new infections. The quest for an AIDS treatment—so painfully slow in coming—was successful beyond imagination when it was finally achieved in 1996. In the dozen years since

effective HIV therapy became widely available in the United States, over 26 drugs have been approved, with potency and tolerability increasing along the way.

The search for a vaccine to prevent HIV infection has not gone as smoothly. In the nearly quarter century since Ronald Reagan's secretary of Health and

**Finding a cure for HIV has taken a back seat to treatment and vaccine research.**

Human Services, Margaret Heckler, predicted an AIDS vaccine within a few years, the search appears to be perpetually frustrated by a lack of basic

*(Continued inside)*

## TAG Remembers Paul Newman

When Paul Newman died on September 26, 2008, the world lost an extraordinary man—one of the most talented actors of his generation, a sportsman, an entrepreneur, and a philanthropist. TAG joins those mourning the loss of a man whose film work touched and inspired millions of people, and whose philanthropy helped millions more. TAG was just one of hundreds of non-profit organizations to benefit from the philanthropy of his Newman's Own brand of foods. TAG's first donations from Paul Newman came in 1999 and to date we have received over \$475,000 from Newman's Own and the Paul Newman Foundation. We send our condolences to his wife of fifty years, Joanne Woodward, his five children, two grandsons, his older brother, and to all his colleagues, friends, and family. ●

DEAR FRIENDS OF TAG,

We have had a truly great year at Treatment Action Group. As you will read in this issue of *TAGupdate*, we have added three new directors to our board, hired a deputy director, launched our new website, and established our U.S. and Global Health Policy program, which is working at full steam. And now that the elections have given us the "change" we've been hoping for, we have even more reason to be energized and excited about the year ahead.

Our core work is going strong and thanks to you, our loyal supporters, we look forward to 2009 and pledge you the same level of passion and commitment to the fight against HIV/AIDS that you have come to expect from us. We are not only covering the science, but changing it.

**Barbara Hughes**  
President, Board of Directors

## WHAT'S INSIDE

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## IN BRIEF WHAT'S GOING ON

### PIPELINE REPORT

#### **TAG Reports on New Drugs in Development**

The *2008 Pipeline Report*, TAG's annual review of drugs, diagnostics, and prevention technologies in the product development pipeline, was widely distributed in Mexico City at the XVII International AIDS Conference this summer. In addition to covering the traditional HIV treatment and vaccine candidates, the report called attention to the sluggish pipeline for new drugs for the treatment of tuberculosis, the leading killer of people with HIV worldwide, and introduced a new chapter covering treatment research on the hepatitis B virus (HBV). Continuing a trend seen in 2007, drug development research aimed at the hepatitis C virus (HCV) was brisk in 2008. TAG is planning an update to reflect changes within that field during the first part of 2009.

The annual report features easy-to-read capsule reviews of experimental drugs and products likely to become available to people living with HIV within the next few years. All of TAG's publications may be freely reproduced for non-profit use. Copies can be found on TAG's website at [www.treatmentactiongroup.org](http://www.treatmentactiongroup.org).

### PALM HIV BASIC SCIENCE PROJECT

#### **More Fallout from HIV Vaccine Failure**

Shock waves from the failure of Merck's HIV vaccine candidate continued to reverberate in 2008. TAG's Richard Jefferys, coordinator of the Michael Palm Basic Science, Vaccines, and Prevention Project, covered a specially convened summit on vaccine research held in May and submitted an extensive, detailed response to a National Institutes of

Health "request for information" on the future of the field. Richard also authored a TAG position statement recommending against conducting a large vaccine efficacy trial involving a candidate similar to Merck's; this trial is now being significantly scaled back. TAG's Palm Project blog provided ongoing, cutting-edge coverage of these and other issues in vaccine and basic science research throughout the year.

### TB/HIV PROJECT

#### **Impact of TB/HIV Activism Growing**

In 2008, TAG's TB/HIV project held three advocacy workshops to help increase the capacity of African HIV activist organizations to take up TB/HIV advocacy. TB, despite being curable, causes nine million new infections and two million deaths each year, and continues to be the leading cause of death among people with HIV globally. TAG's workshop participants have begun showing impressive results as they use their newly acquired skills and knowledge to provide leadership in the struggle for better TB diagnosis, treatment, and care. Their success stories were highlighted in a recent issue of the World Health Organization's bimonthly newsletter, *TB/HIV Update*.

Another goal of TAG's TB/HIV project is to expedite research that effectively addresses the coepidemic. To this end, TAG convened research meetings focused on multidrug-resistant TB and on developing better diagnostics for TB, both of which are yielding ongoing advocacy. For the third year in a row, TAG published its influential report tracking TB research investment, which again received widespread attention for identifying critical gaps in funding.

### HEPATITIS/HIV PROJECT

#### **TAG Expands Activism on Viral Hepatitis**

TAG's Hepatitis/HIV project expanded its staff and scope in 2008 as newly hired project coordinator Lei Chou began covering hepatitis B virus (HBV) and HIV/HBV coinfection, a new arena for treatment activism.

In 2008, the Project's initiative in Thailand continued to support community activism on research and access to care and treatment for viral hepatitis and HIV. Project director Tracy Swan presented at the XVII International AIDS Conference, the HIV DART meeting on antiretroviral drug development, and the International Harm Reduction Association's annual conference. Lei Chou participated in the National Institutes of Health's Consensus Development Conference on Management of Hepatitis B, and Tracy served on the federal Food and Drug Administration's Antiviral Advisory Committee. TAG was also instrumental in organizing a second, groundbreaking meeting on hepatitis C drug development in Sitges, Spain.

The project provided technical assistance to staff at AIDS drug assistance programs, state health departments, and hospitals, and to prison peer educators. Tracy and Lei published reports on viral hepatitis drug development and released updated versions of the *Guide to Hepatitis C for People Living with HIV* in English, Spanish, and Russian.

Through global collaborations with activists, researchers, policy makers, regulators, and the pharmaceutical industry, TAG's Hepatitis/HIV Project continues to develop and promote research and policies to improve access to care and treatment for all people with viral hepatitis and HIV.

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scientific knowledge about the human immune system and what happens when HIV intrudes.

Hopes of permanently curing HIV infection never soared very high after it was discovered that the virus actually inserts its DNA into the DNA of its target immune cells. New viruses are made as a by-product of the cell's transcribing DNA to perform its normal functions. Some of these infected immune cells can quietly hide in lymph nodes for years, harboring a hidden reservoir of virus. When the new treatments were pioneered in 1996, it was hoped that over time these cells would die off and, if the drugs prevented any new cells from becoming infected, the infection would eventually burn itself out. Mathematical estimations of this scenario soon showed that—even if perfect suppression could be achieved—it may take 20 years or more to eradicate HIV from the body with drugs alone. After that disappointment, hopes for a cure dimmed as science turned to the more realistic goals of improving treatments and discovering a vaccine.

In 2007, the first of a new class of drugs called integrase inhibitors was approved by the FDA. These new drugs work by preventing the viral DNA from inserting itself into the immune cell's DNA. Some think that they may pose a nearly impenetrable barrier to new infections. The potency of integrase inhibitors has stimulated interest in bringing virus levels far lower than had been previously thought possible and has revived talk of eradicating HIV. But the long life of the infected reservoir cells is still a problem.

One approach to flushing the reservoir has been to stimulate the resting cells into action, thus luring out the silent HIV so it becomes susceptible to antiviral drugs. Early attempts used agents that stimulated the immune system too indiscriminately and were scuttled by toxicity. Some scientists are now proposing ideas for stimulating hidden HIV-infected cells with greater precision. Others think it



**TAG executive director Mark Harrington addressed the XVII International AIDS Conference 2008 in Centro Banamex, Mexico City, August 6, 2008. Harrington delivered “Looking to the Future: The Epidemic in 2031 and New Directions in AIDS Research.”**

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may be possible to identify the cells and specifically target them for destruction. Still others think it may be possible to permanently switch off mechanisms in the cells that HIV depends on for replication. Compared to the search for a vaccine, finding a cure for HIV has come to seem almost plausible and cautious optimism has returned to the field.

### **Some scientists are now proposing ideas for stimulating hidden HIV-infected cells with greater precision.**

Yet there are many hurdles to overcome—some scientific, but many bureaucratic, which is why TAG organized the Cure Meeting in Washington.

Many scientists say they have good ideas that need to be tested in people but cannot obtain funding because the current grant mechanisms of the National Institutes for Health (NIH) are not oriented to support so-called translational research that moves therapies from the laboratory to the clinic. Other barriers involve FDA guidelines for how research can be performed on people; some of these requirements limit what university-based scientists can accomplish on limited budgets.

Pharmaceutical industry cooperation will also be required to test innovative concepts for eliminating HIV. New compounds being developed by small biotechnology companies for other diseases may have potential for this research. Yet HIV scientists are often unable to access these experimental agents because companies don't want to jeopardize their goal of achieving FDA approval for their target market. Scientists need a method for obtaining these drugs while indemnifying the companies in case unanticipated toxicities appear in people with HIV.

The Cure Meeting invited key leaders from the NIH; other, nongovernmental funders of AIDS research; the FDA; top scientists working in the field of HIV persistence and eradication; doctors involved with cutting-edge HIV studies; and HIV treatment activists. Discussion was divided between roadblocks and opportunities, both in the science and in the funding and practical spheres.

TAG plans to follow up on the directions outlined at the meeting with an advocacy campaign aimed at revitalizing research to permanently defeat HIV. ●

## TAG IN THE NEWS

*Wall Street Journal*

### Glaxo's HIV-Drug Ads Draw Critics

August 25, 2008

"GlaxoSmithKline PLC, one of the biggest sellers of drugs to fight the AIDS virus, is drawing criticism over magazine ads in the U.S. that patient-support groups say attempt to scare patients away from trying newer drug regimens."

"Bob Huff, antiretroviral project director at Treatment Action Group, an advocacy group in New York, says he complained to Glaxo a few months ago about an ad that shows shark-infested waters with the message: 'Don't take a chance—stick with the HIV medicine that's working for you.' Mr. Huff calls the ad offensive and aimed at instilling fear in patients. The ads carry Glaxo's logo but don't promote specific drugs."

*Washington Post*

### Vaccine Failure Is Setback in AIDS Fight

March 21, 2008

"The two-decade search for an AIDS vaccine is in crisis after two field tests of the most promising contender not only did not protect people from the virus but may actually have put them at increased risk of becoming infected... ."

"'We can't afford to have any more trials like this,' said Mark Harrington, head of the activist Treatment Action Group and a longtime observer of AIDS research. 'We have to stop and reassess and recommit to basic science, or people will begin to lose faith.'"

## TB/HIV Activist Workshop

Entebbe, Uganda  
September 16-19, 2008



Left: TAG's TB/HIV program director Javid Syed listens to a workshop presentation. Center: Javid welcomes the workshop participants to Entebbe.



## TAG EVENTS

EAST VILLAGE, MANHATTAN

### Palm Donor Circle



TAG board members [L to R:] Joy Episalla and Jason Osher with TAG supporter Rick Schubel at the 2008 Palm Donor Circle event.

On a warm spring night in May, TAG board member and artist Joy Episalla and her partner Carrie Yamaoka, who donated last year's limited edition print *Twelve Blues* to TAG for the 2007 Research in Action Awards, opened their East Village home to the Michael Palm Donor Circle, TAG's most generous individual supporters. Almost 30 donors, TAG board members, staff, and friends of TAG attended the event. Wine, cocktails, and light hors d'oeuvres were served as the warm spring evening faded into night. Palm Donor Circle members contributed over \$28,550 for the event, the most successful to date. Thanks to Joy and Carrie for their hospitality and to all who attended and to those who donated but could not attend. If you are interested in joining TAG's Palm Donor Circle please consider a donation of \$1,000 or more in 2009.



Right: Judith Najjuka of the International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (ICW)-East Africa and TAG TB/HIV program coordinator Claire Wingfield.

Photos: David Muttu

## TAG Welcomes Three New Board Members

**Jamie Saakvitne** has lived in New York for over 20 years. He holds an undergraduate degree in history from Yale University and a masters in business



Jamie Saakvitne

administration from Stanford University. Jamie has worked for J.P. Morgan since 1990, where for the past 10 years he has managed its municipal credit group, which helps

cities, states, hospitals, and universities across the country issue tax-exempt bonds. From 1995 to 1998 he lived in Hong Kong. His partner Daniel Chow is a pastry chef and baker.

Jamie was a buddy for GMHC in the mid-1980s and has maintained his interest in organizations that fight AIDS since that time. He has been a senior sponsor of J.P. Morgan's AIDSWalk team for the past two years. Jamie supports

TAG because of its ability to leverage its limited budget by influencing the vastly larger research budgets of pharmaceutical companies and the federal government.

As a member of TAG's board of directors, Jamie hopes to offer his business skills to help the organization define its strategy and tactics, and to make sure the organization's limited resources and extraordinarily talented and dedicated professionals are being used in the most effective way possible. ●

**Kevin Goetz** is a leading movie-market research executive with a keen understanding of how to gauge audience tastes and trends. Kevin is president of the Worldwide Motion Picture Group



Kevin Goetz

at the consumer research firm OTX, where he has the ear of nearly every major studio head, independent film executive, producer, and director in the

film business. He was recently invited to join the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in recognition of his significant contributions to the industry over the past 20 years.

Kevin serves on the board of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Southern California and heads up his own nonprofit organization, the Rhoda Goetz Foundation for MS.

TAG sparked Kevin's interest many years ago when he learned that David Geffen

had become a donor because of the group's grassroots nature and because most of the money TAG raised went toward its actual work and not to an inflated infrastructure.

As a new member of TAG's board of directors, Kevin hopes to help TAG develop a long-range business plan, and would like to bring his marketing and research expertise to help drive that effort. He also hopes to see TAG grow its fundraising and increase its influence in the fight against HIV/AIDS. ●

**David Sigal** is honored to be on TAG's board of directors. He is a strong believer in science-based activism.

David has worked extensively as a director, documentarian, and cinematographer. He is currently

directing *Florent*, a feature-length documentary about the restaurateur Florent Morellet. He is also associate producer of *Fair Game*, a Warner Brothers film based on the best-selling autobiography by former CIA agent

Valerie Plame. Sigal's first feature-length film, *The Look*, debuted at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2003. He graduated with an MFA in film from New York University. ●

## TAG's First Deputy Director Scott W. Morgan

TAG is excited to announce its first deputy director, Scott W. Morgan. Executive director Mark Harrington introduces Scott to TAG supporters.

*Scott, tell us about your background and skills.*

I have spent a good portion of my career in the private sector consulting, managing technology outsourcing projects, and running operations at various

corporations. When I decided about five years ago to move away from corporate America, I found that my consulting, technology, and facilitation skills were valuable for nonprofits. I consulted with many organizations that spanned sectors: education, HIV and AIDS service organizations, youth services, and community advocacy, among others. I have also been privileged to work with a youth development program teaching

HIV prevention in South Africa and with a community network in Tanzania that created a youth-focused HIV prevention program.

*What brought you to TAG?*

I recently completed my masters of public administration in international nonprofit management and policy at NYU. I focused on the AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa and on policy

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## TAG'S NEWEST STAFF MEMBER

### Scott W. Morgan

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Scott W. Morgan

issues of HIV/AIDS and harm reduction in Russia. After graduation I looked for an organization that could benefit from my management and operational background, but it was also very

important for me to join a team where I could dig deeper into the complexities of global health policy and expand my knowledge of HIV/AIDS.

*What do you hope to accomplish in the coming year at TAG?*

In my first few months at TAG, I've been extremely impressed by what such a small organization has accomplished. It's a bit intimidating, working with so many incredibly knowledgeable and smart people! In the coming year I plan to work with the staff and the board to implement efficiencies in the infrastructure and operations so that every dollar goes further in supporting the work of TAG.

I'll also spend a good bit of time building relationships with existing funders and establishing new relationships that support our work. To do that, I'll be learning more about TAG's programs and about global health policy and HIV treatment science and research. Knowing TAG's programs inside and out will help me to make the strongest possible contribution to TAG's work.

*What are your thoughts on where TAG needs to go over the next five years?*

TAG started as a scrappy, grassroots organization but has evolved into a one-of-a-kind, science-based think tank and advocacy organization that is known around the world. As TAG continues to grow, there is enormous potential for its work to influence health care policy at the global level while providing information and skills that build capacity in activist communities. Staying close to TAG's core work as activists is critical. I think growth in TAG's case is not about size but about creating an ever-expanding beneficial impact for people living with HIV. ●

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## TAG BE INVOLVED

### About TAG

Treatment Action Group is an independent AIDS research and policy think tank fighting for better treatment, a vaccine, and a cure for AIDS. TAG works to ensure that all people with HIV receive lifesaving treatment, care, and information. We are science-based treatment activists working to expand and accelerate vital research and effective community engagement with research and policy institutions. TAG catalyzes open collective action by all affected communities, scientists, and policy makers to end AIDS.

TAG's project areas encompass antiretroviral treatments, basic science, vaccines, prevention, viral hepatitis, and tuberculosis.

### How to Contribute

TAG welcomes donations from individuals who want to see the AIDS research agenda remain responsive to the needs of all people living with HIV.

TAG is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1992 and based in New York City.

### Join TAG's Board

TAG is always seeking new board members. If you are looking for a great place to invest your time and talents, please call Barbara Hughes, TAG Board President, to learn more about Board opportunities with TAG.

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