

# MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE

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It's been a topsy-turvy few months in the HIV prevention world. Two major circumcision trials were interrupted because the benefit of male circumcision was so marked. At the same time, two microbicide trials were stopped, one because of a low HIV incidence rate, making the trial impossible to complete, and another more recently that suggested no benefit from microbicides, and possibly even harm. The media storm over the ending of the microbicides trials is unfortunate, as the news reports referred to 'guinea pigs' and poor oversight, though there was no real proof of any wrongdoing by the scientists.

All this is very frustrating, leaving clinicians and public health policy makers with very few biological interventions to prevent HIV. Mother-to-child prevention works well but is poorly implemented, ditto for post-exposure prophylaxis for sexual assault; condoms work if used consistently, but very few people use them consistently; and circumcision is still trying to find its place. A useable vaccine looks years away. Luckily, a novel microbicide made of seaweed (!) is being tested in phase three trials, and results are expected by the end of the year.



In the wake of the microbicide criticism in some of the media, we must continue to insist on rigorous clinical trials. Our countries have been under siege by non-scientific quacks and opportunists for too long to retreat from good science.

**FRANCOIS VENTER**

*President*