



Impactful science from Africa: HIV Prevention for women -



Innovations and Future Directions

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Abstract

Over the past three decades, through science, activism and global solidarity, remarkable progress has been made in the global HIV response. Yet ending AIDS as a public health threat remains elusive, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where adolescent girls and young women continue to bear a disproportionate burden of new infections with a concomitant epidemic of HIV in infants and ongoing high maternal mortality rates in young women living with HIV. Gendered vulnerabilities, structural barriers, and biological factors converge to heighten HIV risk and poorer sexual reproductive health outcomes in young women. After 18 years of multiple failures, with persistence and perseverance, the quest for a women-initiated HIV prevention technology finally shows some hope and paves the way for understanding the vaginal microbiome and the development of a growing array of anti-retrovirals for prevention also called pre-exposure prophylaxis or PrEP, culminating two years ago in 100% protection of women on a twice a year injection of a capsid inhibitor, Lenacapavir. But, will Lenacapavir simply replace daily, oral tenofovir and its challenge of persistent use or will it be a game-changer and get us back on track to ending AIDS as a public health threat? Will the insertion of exogenous strains of *Lactobacillus crispatus* restore the female genital tract health and offer protection against HIV and other pathogens or will other lurking villains continue to dominate? Can science offer hope to young women and enable them to survive and take on the social challenge of gender-power disparities that undergirds their vulnerability?

Biography

Quarraisha Abdool Karim, FRS is a world renowned South African infectious diseases epidemiologist and co-founder of the Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research in South Africa (CAPRISA), where she is the John C. Martin Chair in Global Health and Associate Scientific Director. She is President of The World Academy of Sciences (TWAS) and UNAIDS Special Ambassador for Adolescents and HIV. She has authored more than 300 peer-reviewed publications in leading journals, including Science, Nature, The New England Journal of Medicine, and The Lancet, and co-edited key reference works such as the Oxford Textbook of Global Public Health and HIV in South Africa. She is an elected member of the U.S. National Academy of Medicine and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and a Fellow of TWAS and the Royal Society. She has received multiple honorary doctorates and has been inducted to the Order of Mapungubwe, South Africa's highest national honour. Her contributions have been recognised with more than 30 major awards, including the VinFuture Prize, the inaugural African Academy of Science Olusegun Obasanjo Prize for Scientific Breakthrough and/or Technological Innovation, the TWAS-Lenovo Science Award; L'Oréal-UNESCO Women in Science Award (MENA region), the Canada Gairdner Global Health Award, the Noguchi Africa Prize, the Virchow Award and the Lasker-Bloomberg Public Service Award.