



USAID Bureau of Global Health: Employee *Close Up* Q&A

- Featuring -



Margaret McCluskey

Senior Technical Advisor for Vaccines, Office of HIV/AIDS

Q: How did you get involved in development work?

A: I simply followed the direction of a virus. Since 1981, HIV has essentially charted the map of my career; my job has been to try and keep up. Early on, HIV crept its way into the lungs of the men in the ICU where I worked. It then gave rise to several malignancies in the patients I cared for while practicing oncology and hospice nursing, and later hijacked the lives of the women and children I cared for at Chicago's Cook County Hospital. After the Rwandan Genocide, I was asked to go and help out; HIV was rampant there. Upon my return to the US, I simply wed myself to the notion that a vaccine might be able to stem the tide of the pandemic. This notion took me to Hopkins then to the NIH and now to USAID. I'm an atypical "development worker," but since finding an AIDS vaccine is part and parcel to development work, I faithfully follow.

Q: If you weren't working in development or public health, what would you be doing? Why?

A: That's funny. I don't dwell much on this. If you find something really worth doing, you might as well give it all you've got – which is what I try to do. I decided a while ago that I had to channel my talents and energy toward





work that focuses on stopping this ridiculously harmful virus. So, for now my fantasy career as a concert cellist, marine biologist, developing-world surgeon or documentary film-maker will just have to wait. I'm just "yer trusty vaccine gal," and really okay with that.

Q: What might someone be surprised to learn about you?

A: Most people probably don't know that, for five years, I lived with over 500 disabled young adults and children in Chicago at a very special home called Misericordia, Heart of Mercy Village. They were unrepeatable years with simply remarkable people who showered more love on those in their midst than one can imagine. I was very fortunate to be the nurse in residence at Misericordia while working in the Women and Children's HIV Clinic at Cook County Hospital – quite a daily contrast between the two worlds...unforgettable times.



Q: What's the hardest thing you've ever done?

A: Telling my little brothers that our Mom would not get well; losing countless patients and friends to AIDS in the 80's and 90s; working in true humanitarian emergencies in post-Genocide Rwanda and post-war Kosovo; "giving birth" to the Vaccine Research Center Clinic at the NIH - all not easy. Yet, achieving the sole-source procurement for OHA to continue to support HIV vaccine research was pretty darn tough. I guess

the old saying holds: "If it was easy, everybody'd be doing it."

Q: If you could witness any event -- past, present or future -- what would it be and why?

A: That's easy. I'd like to see the Cubs win the pennant, but I'll settle for the day a licensed HIV vaccine is administered. What I wouldn't give to draw it out of the vial myself...