

EXPANDING EFFECTIVE CONTRACEPTIVE OPTIONS IN MALAWI TO INCLUDE THE WOMAN'S CONDOM: UNDERSTANDING THE PROVIDER



Photo: PSI/Miguel Samper



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Executive Summary

The female condom (FC) is the only woman-initiated contraceptive that offers triple protection against unintended pregnancy, HIV, and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). However, global use of female condoms remains low, due in part to inconsistent supply and promotion. Under the USAID-funded Expanding Effective Contraceptive Options (EECO) project, WCG Cares (WCG) launched the Woman's Condom in Malawi under the brand name *Whisper*. EECO partner Population Services International (PSI) led a marketing campaign for potential users while WCG led a medical detailing program for providers. Medical detailers visited providers to educate them on the product and address stigma and other barriers at the retail and clinic levels. From 2015 - 2018, the EECO project distributed a total of 23,400 units of *Whisper* in health clinics, pharmacies, kiosks, and other outlets in Malawi. This case study highlights the EECO strategy and lessons learned from the *Whisper* medical detailing program.

Key recommendations from the EECO medical detailing experience:

- » Make use of inexpensive data tools to capture program developments in real-time.
- » Link supply and demand activities so that consumers have easy access to points-of-sale from well-trained providers.
- » Budget for generous amounts of sample stock that can be given to providers and consumers.
- » Highlight new features or design innovations to garner support among providers.
- » Conduct brief in-country acceptability studies to provide local evidence for support of the product.

Acronyms

EECO	Expanding Effective Contraceptive Options
FC2	Female Condom 2
PSI	Population Services International
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WCG	WCG Cares

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The Project

Expanding Effective Contraceptive Options (EECO) is a USAID- funded project designed to support the introduction of new contraceptive and dual protection methods (i.e., those that protect against unintended pregnancy as well as sexually transmitted infections) to address method-related reasons for non-use. Each product in the EECO basket possesses important benefits; some are non-hormonal, others are long-acting and reversible, and others are discreet or used only on-demand. With several woman-initiated methods offered, the products have the potential to help overcome provider-related access barriers, such as a limited number of skilled providers, and provider biases.

EECO relies on formative research and follow-up with providers and consumers to market products effectively. In the project planning phase, the EECO team analyzed research on both the emotional and physical needs of consumers, while assessing the contraceptive landscape in each of the introduction countries. Based on these analyses, project partners identified each product's most likely target audiences, its perceived positive and negative traits, the distribution and communication channels that have the most appeal for each method, and the type of training and advocacy required for each. These approaches will be tested throughout the project, and used to make decisions on bringing products to scale or to expanding introduction to additional countries.

By project's end, EECO will have produced roadmaps for product introduction, including the generation of stakeholder support and consumer demand for woman-initiated family planning and dual protection methods. Pilots in Zambia, Malawi, Madagascar, Nigeria, and Niger will provide women with more choices to prevent unplanned pregnancy and STIs such as HIV/AIDS. The first of these pilots started in Malawi and Zambia in mid-2014 with the launch of the Woman's Condom.

The Woman's Condom

The Woman's Condom, designed by PATH, was created following an iterative, human-centered design process to address concerns that women had with previous generations of female condoms. The Woman's Condom is made of a soft and thin material, and does not contain an inner ring like other female condoms. When inserted, the Woman's Condom adheres to the interior of the vagina through four small dots of soft, absorbent foam. These dots hold the condom securely in place during use and release from the vaginal walls on removal. To ease insertion, the Woman's Condom features a rounded capsule on the end of the condom. Upon insertion, the capsule dissolves in less than a minute. The Woman's Condom is non-hormonal and intended for one-time use.



In 2008, PATH transferred production of the Woman's Condom to the Dahua Medical Apparatus Company of Shanghai, China. Dahua has received approval to market the product in China, Europe, and South Africa. As part of the EECO project, the Woman's Condom was additionally registered in Zambia and Malawi. The Woman's Condom achieved WHO/UNFPA prequalification in 2016, allowing the UN and other international purchasers to obtain the product for public sector distribution.

The EECO Team

WCG Cares (WCG) leads the team, bridging the private sector and non-profit worlds, and linking upstream product developers/suppliers and downstream marketing and distribution partners. WCG leads regulatory and quality assurance efforts, intensive medical detailing and data collection.

Population Services International (PSI), the social marketing partner, works through existing service delivery and product distribution networks to market and distribute the EECO products.

Every1Mobile (E1M), the mHealth partner, creates mobile communities and uses mobile social networking to increase awareness about the methods.

International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), the research and gender partner, conducts consumer and provider research, focusing on product acceptability and contraceptive decision-making.

Evoform, the biotechnology partner, develops and markets products that are woman-initiated, non-invasive, and rapidly reversible.

Introduction

The Expanding Effective Contraceptive Options (EECO) project seeks to meet the various contraceptive needs faced by more than 200 million women in developing countries who do not wish to become pregnant, yet are not using a modern method of family planning¹. Of the women who cite method-related reasons for non-use of modern contraceptives, 26% want methods that do not cause side effects, 24% want methods appropriate for infrequent sex, 20% desire methods suitable to use while breastfeeding, and 23% want discreet methods.² Studies suggest that the critical factors for meeting women's contraceptive needs are: access to a broad choice of methods, improvement in the quality of information and services available, a consistent supply of contraceptive products, and the reduction of social barriers to use.³

The female condom is the only existing on-demand, woman-controlled method that protects against unplanned pregnancy and HIV with no side effects. However, global use of female condoms remains low, due in part to inconsistent supply and promotion. The region of sub-Saharan Africa has the potential to benefit greatly from female condoms, where an estimated 5,000 people per day become newly infected with HIV.³ Rates of HIV vary greatly among key populations, with women bearing a higher burden of new infections due to biological, socioeconomic, cultural, and structural risk factors.⁴

The Woman's Condom was created using a user-centered design process that took place over a six-year period (1998-2003) and consulted women and couples across four continents about their preferences. The result of this iterative process is a product that addresses many of the performance and acceptability issues among first-generation female condoms and is highly acceptable to users.⁵

However, a new product design does not guarantee uptake among users. Among the various barriers to contraceptive use, provider-related barriers include a limited number of skilled providers, as well as biases against family planning – barriers that may limit uptake and sustained use at the consumer level. For the female condom specifically, a high level of stigma exists due to the historical trend of targeting the product towards commercial

The female condom is the only existing on-demand, woman-controlled method that protects against unplanned pregnancy and HIV with no side effects.



sex workers, resulting in a perception among providers and consumers that all female condoms are intended for this key population rather than the general public. Retailers of family planning products, including medical providers, pharmacists, and other vendors, therefore play a pivotal role in creating or blocking access to new family planning methods. This case study focuses on the introduction of a new female condom in Malawi, with the use of innovative medical detailing to address stigma and barriers to uptake among medical providers and other vendors.

Medical detailing is a common form of interpersonal communication used in the pharmaceutical industry to promote medical devices or drugs to medical or retail providers. Field representatives called “medical detailers” may: map the type and location of facilities or retail outlets in the area; estimate the volume and profile of clients that frequent each facility/outlet; assess the potential benefit to adding additional items to the product mix; and, segment provider types based on baseline perceptions of the new product. Medical detailers visit and speak with providers regularly, identifying and addressing providers’ individual-level barriers to offering the product successfully.

¹ Adding It Up: The Costs and Benefits of Investing in Sexual and Reproductive Health 2017, fact sheet, New York: Guttmacher Institute, 2017, <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/adding-it-up-contraception-mnh-2017>.

² Hussain R et al., Unmet Need for Contraception in Developing Countries: Examining Women's Reasons for Not Using a Method, New York: Guttmacher Institute, 2016, <http://www.guttmacher.org/report/unmet-need-for-contraception-in-developing-countries>.

³ HIV.gov. The Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic. <https://www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/overview/data-and-trends/global-statistics>

⁴ Ramjee, G. and Daniels, B. Women and HIV in Sub-Saharan Africa. *AIDS Research and Therapy* (2013); 10:30. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3874682/>

⁵ Beksinska, M.E., et al. Performance and safety of the second-generation female condom (FC2) versus the Woman's, the VA worn-of-women, and the Cupid female condoms: a randomised controlled non-inferiority crossover trial. *Lancet Global Health* (2013); 1(3):e146-52. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25104263>



EECO Process

Recognizing that the successful introduction of new products involves multiple players and an understanding of market dynamics, WCG Cares (WCG) assembled a team of organizations covering the entire product life cycle - from development to end-use. EECO determines how best to improve the value chain by coordinating market players (product developers, researchers, market analysts, etc.), sharing information, and conducting stakeholder advocacy. This value chain approach, together with a focus on activities that are driven by consumer insights, can be applied to bring any new reproductive health product to market.

Providers (e.g., healthcare workers such as doctors, nurses, midwives, etc.) as well as retailers and wholesalers (e.g., pharmacies, kiosks, supermarkets, and other shops) play important roles in the value chain. Clients can only access new products if providers, retailers, and wholesalers stock and sell those products. In addition to extrinsic challenges like poor infrastructure and stockouts of products, these actors often face intrinsic challenges. They need the motivation to offer products like the Woman's Condom, supportive social norms, and in the case of providers and retailers, the skills to communicate effectively with clients about the product. The value chain from product manufacturers to end users breaks down if market actors like providers have a bias against the product, doubt that there will be demand for it, or do not feel confident promoting it. To engage these market actors in Malawi, the EECO team conducted an intensive medical detailing program, and provided point-of-sale materials to promote the Woman's Condom under the brand name *Whisper*. (For more information on EECO marketing strategies for the Woman's Condom, please refer to the first case study in this series: ***Expanding Effective Contraceptive Options in Zambia and Malawi: Understanding the Consumer***. <https://www.psi.org/publication/expanding-effective-contraceptive-options-in-zambia-and-malawi-understanding-the-consumer/>)

Figure 1: Value Chain of Market Actors

- » Product Developers and Manufacturers
- » Importers
- » Distributors
- » Wholesalers
- » Providers
- » Consumers

Figure 2: EECO Product Introduction Stages

Figure 2 illustrates the EECO product introduction process. Medical detailing fits into Stage 4 of this process.



STAGE 1

Regulatory Assessment & Product Registration

- Perform regulatory landscape assessment
- Engage stakeholders and meet with regulatory authorities
- Support identification of a suitable market authorization holder
- Prepare the registration package, submit and support its lifecycle upon approval



STAGE 2

Consumer & Market Research

- Plan and conduct market research
- Complete market segmentation analysis
- Determine pricing and branding strategies



STAGE 3

Procurement & Quality Assurance

- Perform manufacturer audits
- Initiate pre-shipment inspection and testing of product
- Develop and initiate pharmacovigilance systems



STAGE 4

Marketing, Distribution & Service Delivery

- Launch product, with marketing and communications support
- Supply stock to commercial outlets and providers
- Deploy medical detailers to train and follow-up with providers



STAGE 5

Monitoring & Learning

- Monitor and course-correct
- Conduct baseline and endline evaluations
- Disseminate lessons learned

Background – The Gladys Archetype

In Malawi, there is a need for new and improved contraceptive methods for women and girls. HIV prevalence is twice as high among young women aged 15 to 24, and nearly three times as high among women aged 25 to 29, compared to their male counterparts.⁶ Condom use among youth with multiple partners is inconsistent, and lower among young women compared to young men.⁷ For these reasons, it is particularly important to provide dual protection methods - such as male and female condoms – that meet the needs of women and their partners to prevent both unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as HIV/AIDS.

EECO developed the archetype of a provider working in this context in Malawi in order to help medical detailers understand a typical provider's perspective. By imagining a day in the life of a provider, we can begin to empathize with her, see the opportunities and challenges she sees before her, and identify solutions that will allow her to successfully offer the Woman's Condom.

"Gladys" is a licensed pharmacist and pharmacy owner in Malawi, whose facility is located at a busy intersection in the center of the capital city, Lilongwe. Her shop is small but tidy. Unlike some of her neighboring business owners, Gladys is very meticulous about keeping her shelves in order and her shop well-stocked. Her pharmacy is always packed with customers who want to buy their goods quickly before running out to catch the bus or go to work. Gladys strives to provide excellent customer service and takes pride in the fact that customers can always count on her for what they need. Gladys employs five shop attendants, most of whom are young women. She stocks a variety of items including beauty products, medicines, stationery, and family planning methods such as male and female condoms and oral contraceptive pills. She sells family planning products because they are popular and move quickly, and she can usually turn a profit on them. However, she is ambivalent about promoting family planning within her community, especially for young women whom she thinks should wait until marriage before having sex.

Gladys is very active in her church and also volunteers at a number of local organizations. Her husband is the church minister and is well-known around town. With her busy schedule, Gladys spends very little time in the pharmacy, leaving the day-to-day activities up to the manager. When product salespeople come to the pharmacy, she usually asks her employees to take a pamphlet from them so that she can make a decision on any new products at a later date. Gladys is not interested in stocking products that don't move off the shelf. She knows from experience which family planning methods are easy to sell and which will simply 'collect dust'.



Woman's Condom Providers

Typically, the term "provider" is reserved for medically trained personnel who interact with consumers. For the purposes of this case study, however, the term "provider" will be used to encompass clinic providers, pharmacists and pharmacy staff, and other retail vendors who carry condom products and interact with consumers. The reason for this broader definition is that the target audience for the medical detailing program went beyond the typical healthcare provider to include a variety of staff within the health system who interact with potential condom users. The goal of the program was to ensure access by decreasing bias among medical providers and other gatekeepers at points-of-sale so that women would feel comfortable purchasing *Whisper*.

⁶ Ministry of Health, Malawi. Malawi Population-based HIV Impact Assessment (MPHIA) 2015-16: First Report. Lilongwe, Ministry of Health. November 2017. https://phia.icap.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Final-MPHIA-First-Report_11.15.17.pdf

⁷ According to the 2015-16 Malawi Demographic and Health Survey, 52% of young men versus 36% of young women with multiple partners report condom use at last sexual intercourse.



Gladys' story is an archetypal representation of a key sales channel – pharmacies. EECO works with pharmacists like Gladys and her staff to address social stigma around family planning and female condoms, and to increase access to new methods. Though Gladys is rarely present, she is a gatekeeper and an influencer – both in and outside of the pharmacy. By counseling Gladys on the importance of offering method choice to women and training her staff on proper counseling and promotion techniques for *Whisper*, EECO hopes to foster a more positive attitude towards *Whisper* and condoms overall.

Ultimately, the goal of this two-fold strategy was to increase access to and uptake of *Whisper*, and thereby offer women and their partners protection against unintended pregnancies and HIV/STIs.

The Approach

The EECO approach to generating demand for female condoms in Malawi was two-fold. First, the team registered and launched the new and improved Woman's Condom. Second, the team coupled user-focused marketing and communication campaigns managed by EECO partner Population Services International (PSI), with an intensive medical detailing program to educate providers and vendors, and to address long-held stigma and social barriers to female condom use at the retail and clinic-level. Ultimately, the goal of this two-fold strategy was to increase access to and uptake of *Whisper*, and thereby offer women and their partners protection against unintended pregnancies and HIV/STIs.



Brand Promotion

WCG has partnered with Population Services International (PSI) Malawi to introduce the *Whisper* Woman's Condom. PSI conducted in-depth market research with consumers to develop a robust marketing and branding campaign. The PSI team also leads interpersonal education and communication activities with a team of Brand Promoters in each city. Brand Promoters are out in the community on a daily basis engaging consumers and promoting *Whisper*. They demonstrate the features of the product, provide information on the importance of dual protection methods, and connect interested consumers to nearby points-of-sale.

WCG Medical Detailing

WCG uses an adapted medical detailing practice to educate and train health providers and vendors of *Whisper* in order to reduce provider-related barriers to consumer access. Medical detailers begin by identifying and recruiting potential providers in the target area who may be willing to stock *Whisper* and would likely have interactions with members of the target audience, for example, at pharmacies that are close to universities or clinics that are at busy intersections.

After enrolling providers in the program, the detailers conduct a comprehensive on-site product training during which they demonstrate product features and discuss the uses, benefits, and potential side effects

of *Whisper*. They also provide information and training on how providers can counsel women and their partners on using *Whisper*, and discuss perceptions and attitudes

towards female condoms with the provider. After the initial visit, detailers conduct frequent check-ins to offer additional trainings, to supply top-ups of stock, to work with new facility personnel, and to track changes over time in perception of female condoms.

A key component of the WCG medical detailing model is values clarification, where the detailers evaluate the provider's personal, professional, or religious objections to female condoms, and determine the best pathway to address these biases. The frequency of follow-up visits is based on whether providers are open and accepting of the new method, if they need some additional training, or if they are deeply opposed to female condoms or woman-initiated methods. Providers who show enthusiasm and support for *Whisper* are coached on becoming Champion providers. Champion providers are high performing, selling stock quickly and engaging the broader community in the promotion of *Whisper*. For providers who are resistant, WCG medical detailers conduct more frequent and dedicated training, at least once per month, using values clarification exercises to understand provider biases and creating tailored value propositions for supporting female condoms. Providers who were identified as being highly unlikely to become productive vendors of *Whisper* were removed from the provider list.

WCG medical detailers are equipped with product samples, stock for sale, training materials, and point-of-sale promotional materials to promote *Whisper* to potential users. They also use pre-programmed tablets to assist in their trainings and to collect information on key program indicators.

WCG's model relies heavily on data collection to track relationships with individual providers and to create tailored interventions based on data to address their needs. Data are collected and reviewed daily, and individual providers are tracked over time to assess whether their behavior and

perceptions of female condoms are more or less favorable. Tracking these interactions allows the team to determine which strategies are most effective in promoting *Whisper* to various levels and types of providers.

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Value Propositions

Medical detailers use **value propositions** to generate interest in *Whisper*. Below is an example of a value proposition:

Offer

You may want to consider offering *Whisper* to your clients that want or need dual protection from pregnancy and STIs...

Impact

... because offering new and improved dual protection methods will keep your clients satisfied and will strengthen your reputation as a provider.

Proof

Studies show that couples who try *Whisper* are satisfied with the method and are as protected from STIs and pregnancy as with male condoms.

Cost

It costs a little more than other versions of female or male condoms but clients will be interested in trying this new, "luxury" product and will refer their friends to you.



Selection of Medical Detailers

A variety of professional backgrounds are suited to the medical detailer role – pharmaceutical sales, clinical medicine, human resources, advocacy, marketing and sales, etc. WCG's medical detailers possess both in-depth technical knowledge of the products they represent as well as a high level of emotional intelligence to make strong personal connections and encourage providers to adopt a desired behavior.

Critical components of the medical detailing team are the training that the detailers receive on the product itself, as well as the overall objectives and key messages of the program. Detailers must ensure that their messages to providers are aligned with the positioning statement and marketing strategy for each brand. They must also exhibit comprehensive knowledge of family planning, product effectiveness, and the mechanism of action for each product.

Medical Detailers are:

- ✓ **Empathetic**
- ✓ **Good listeners**
- ✓ **Strong communicators**
- ✓ **Detail-oriented**
- ✓ **Problem-solvers and self-starters**

Figure 3: WCG Medical Detailing Model

Identification & Recruitment

Identify providers, retailers and key opinion leaders that could help promote the product

Product Training

Conduct in-depth, frequent training on the technical features of the product and how to counsel clients

Values Clarification

Conduct values clarification exercises with providers and retailers to understand the potential barriers that the product may face due to provider perceptions

Trade Support & Champions

Offer additional support around sales techniques, staffing, infrastructure, etc. Promote champions within the community to become advocates for the product

Data Collection

Medical detailers are equipped with portable tablets that they bring to facility visits. The tablets are programmed with open-source, mobile data collection software, including a variety of ‘forms’ or surveys developed by the WCG team to capture facility demographics, specifics of the medical detailing visit, and product sales. These data allow the detailers to develop tailored interventions for individual providers, and to track trends over time across provider groups (e.g., decreases in stigma towards female condoms among male pharmacists or male-owned supermarkets). For example, if a particular interaction reveals that a provider is struggling to remember the features and use instructions of *Whisper*, the detailer can record this information in their tablet and write a reminder to incorporate a refresher training with sample product during their next visit.

On a daily basis, data are submitted to a live feed that is managed by the medical detailing supervisory team, allowing for real-time program monitoring and feedback. The supervisory team generates monthly reports from the data, that are shared with the medical detailers and partners at PSI/Malawi to review objectives, monitor progress, and discuss strategy.

The main data collection tools are described in detail in the chart below.

Table 1. WCG Medical Detailing Program Data Collection Tools

Data Collection Tool	Description & Purpose
Intake Form	<p>When a provider or facility is visited for the first time, an Intake Form captures contact and facility information, as well as key details related to staffing and structure. Upon completing this form, new facility contacts are automatically added to the detailer’s assigned provider list.</p> <p>Note: <i>The providers and facilities that form part of the Whisper outlet network frequently change owner, location, or staff. Closely tracking interactions with individuals as well as facilities is a key activity for both the detailers and their supervisors.</i></p>
Facility Baseline Assessments	<p>In his or her first visit to a new provider, a WCG medical detailer completes a Facility Baseline Assessment. This short survey is completed in tandem with the provider, and captures key information about the facility and its operations. Questions include aspects of business operations (e.g., type of products and services offered, days/weeks the facility is open), as well as structural questions (e.g., whether there is a space for discreet purchase of family planning products), and the level of training of staff.</p>
Whisper Condom Quiz	<p>The Whisper Condom Quiz is an interactive tool that is used both to test and improve staff and provider knowledge of the product over time.</p> <p>When a provider or Detailer feels that knowledge of the product may have lapsed, the quiz helps to determine what additional training needs to be done. These quizzes also track growth in knowledge over time.</p> <p>Note: <i>Whisper</i> has design features that differ significantly from previous generations of female condoms. These features require the user to insert and use the product in a new way. Upon seeing <i>Whisper</i> for the first time, many providers feel confident that they can counsel women on its use. However, results from the Whisper Condom Quiz demonstrate that providers require frequent and repetitive product training before they are fully able to counsel users on the method.</p>
Interaction Tracker	<p>Routine visits are tracked through Interaction Trackers, a data collection tool that is the crux of the program. During each visit, detailers record their interaction with the provider/facility. Detailers select from a drop-down list of subjects discussed during the visit, including ‘Improving Client Access to Contraception’, ‘Product Technical Training’, ‘Staffing/Management Issues’, and more. The subjects of these interactions were created based on extensive literature review, formative research, and consumer and provider focus groups that were conducted by EECO before launching <i>Whisper</i>.</p> <p>Detailers are also asked to write a brief narrative of each visit at the end of this form. Notes include specifics of the visit, information on follow-up plans, and provider opinions of recent challenges or successes. These qualitative inputs are grouped by theme and used to assess the issues most important to providers. In this way, provider inputs are used to inform program movement and alert the supervisory team to any necessary adaptations.</p>

Provider Insights

The medical detailing program requires that detailers develop a rapport with providers and track their interactions over time to document provider biases and knowledge gaps, and to understand the challenges that providers face in relation to stocking and selling *Whisper*. The detailers review their notes on a weekly basis to plan their routes and interactions, and to create personalized responses on a case-by-case basis.

Beyond the focus on the *Whisper* product itself, the close and collaborative nature of the relationship between a provider and detailer allows for a discussion of sales, staffing, and other facility issues as a whole.

Mapping Providers

Medical detailers begin their week by creating a **Route Plan** that guides their visits over the next five days. With feedback from the supervisory team, medical detailers ensure that facilities are visited at least once every month, and that those who had requested additional information, marketing materials, or product trainings receive support in a timely manner.

Route Plans also allow the detailers to coordinate with the PSI Brand Promotion team to identify new providers and outlets that are accessible to the target audience for *Whisper*. Each week, the detailer meets with the lead Brand Promoter in each city to visit new facilities and to introduce the product to providers. This coordinated effort has proven to be successful in that providers are encouraged by the promise of consumer demand generation efforts that complement medical detailing. This strategy underscores the importance of linking supply and demand activities throughout implementation.

Providers receive varying levels of attention and training based on their baseline perception of female condoms and their willingness to learn about *Whisper*. Below are two examples of these interactions based on whether the provider can be considered a champion provider, or a hesitant provider. Note that these examples are amalgamations of 2-3 real provider experiences within the medical detailing program.

“This facility mostly stocks drugs and medicines, and does not have sessions with women to tell them about family planning; the provider has mostly been alone in the medicine store. But soon there will be a pharmacist and they plan to expand their contraceptive methods. We should return when they are fully staffed and do a training on *Whisper* for the whole team.”

— Detailer notes from a pharmacy in Lilongwe



“I met with the shop assistant. She says that she has been encouraging clients to buy *Whisper*, but from her performance on the *Whisper* Quiz, it shows she lacks knowledge of the product. I trained her on usage and informed her of the benefits of using *Whisper* and she seems confident enough now to detail to clients on the same.”

— Detailer notes from a pharmacy in Mzuzu

“The attending nurse says that she only gives *Whisper* to those who are HIV/AIDS positive because the product is too expensive to give to everyone. I advised that she should also consider her other clients, because, as we don’t know their partners’ status, it’s important they also be proactive in protecting themselves.”

—Detailer notes from a clinic in Blantyre



Photo: PSI/Miguel Samper

The Champion Provider (Retailer)

Jilimani Superette was first visited by Annie, a WCG medical detailer, at a time when *Whisper* had just recently launched in Malawi. The retail store is based in Mzuzu, and sells female and male condoms, emergency contraception, and oral contraceptive pills, among other products. During the first medical detailing visit, the owner, Clara, purchased 15 units of *Whisper* to test the market. From the outset, she was impressed with the quality of the packaging and the new design features of *Whisper*. She thought her clientele would be excited about something new and different from the existing male condoms and the well-known first-generation female condoms, Female Condom 2 (FC2s), that she used to stock. She mentioned to Annie that she became a single mother at age 25, and that she wishes there were more options for women to protect themselves from unintended pregnancy.

Upon Clara's request, Annie visited the facility the following week to train the rest of the staff and to engage them in conversations about female condoms and woman-initiated methods. Following Clara's lead, the team showed great enthusiasm for the product. They placed a top-up order of *Whisper* within a month, and also purchased *Whisper* for Clara's second facility, which is based in a different neighborhood.

Clara is one of many vendors placed on 'maintenance mode'. She has a great grasp of the product features and benefits, is passionate about expanding women's access to quality contraceptives, and has demonstrated her efficiency in getting *Whisper* off the shelves. Now that Clara is in 'maintenance mode', Annie will call or visit Clara's facilities only once a month, but in between visits Clara will call Annie to ask any questions or request a top-up order.

The Hesitant Provider (Private Clinic)

Kachui Private Clinic is part of PSI's franchised clinic system, the Tunza network. Kachui is located in the outskirts of Lilongwe, and its clientele are primarily women (and their children) who live in the vicinity, as well as men who work at the nearby tobacco factory. Dr. Mwangi has owned and operated Kachui Private Clinic for the last 18 years. Given his proximity to the tobacco factory, he is often contracted by management to provide company-wide health presentations about a variety of health topics, including prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS. He enjoys talking with the factory workers, but he is discouraged by the slow rate of change that he has seen over the years in terms of behavior, especially around condom use. Dr. Mwangi discusses all contraceptive options with his clients, both at the clinic and at the tobacco factory. However, in his



experience as a healthcare professional, he has come to believe that men and women simply don't like to use female condoms. They find the material too thick and the condom pouch too noisy during sex. For that reason, he sometimes decides that it is not worth his time to demonstrate *Whisper* to users. Instead, he spends his time discussing methods that he believes his clients are more likely to use. For sex workers, he does recommend the female condom as a practical dual protection method.

On Annie's first visit, Dr. Mwangi was receptive, but seemed unconvinced that *Whisper* would be any different than first-generation female condoms. Annie presented many reasons why Dr. Mwangi should offer a multitude of methods, and why this product might be different from previous female condoms. She left five samples with Dr. Mwangi along with brochures and a poster, and promised to follow up in a week's time to discuss further.

The following week, Annie suggested that they link Dr. Mwangi with the PSI Brand Promoters, whose role is to generate demand among consumers for *Whisper*. Given that Kachui Private Clinic is located very close to the tobacco factory that employs many young men and women, Annie thinks that this facility could be a great venue for consumers from the *Whisper* target audience. Dr. Mwangi hesitantly agreed to stock 20 units of *Whisper*, but asked that Annie provide him with more promotional materials to attract customers. In her next visit, Annie brought along two Brand Promoters, who spent their day in the vicinity of Kachui, engaging consumers and discussing *Whisper* with both men and women. While Dr. Mwangi was pleased to see the stock moving that day, he is hesitant to purchase more until clients come in asking for it. Annie plans to continue building her relationship with Dr. Mwangi with regular visits, support from the Brand Promoters, and lots of coaching on *Whisper* and the importance of dual protection options for women.

"I followed up with Dr. Mwangi on his stance regarding stocking *Whisper*. He said that only one man came to ask for the product so he is not too sure whether the product will be selling or not. He asked to be given more time to think about it and I agreed to follow up with him again in a few weeks' time."

— Medical detailer notes

Medical Detailing by the Numbers

The EECO medical detailing experience generated important lessons about strategies for decreasing provider barriers to female condoms. Chief among these lessons was the frequency and type of interactions that were required before a provider purchased the product for the first time. The medical detailing program found that, while the majority of providers were willing to purchase a small number of *Whisper* units on the first training visit, a significant number of providers required multiple follow-up visits before they were convinced to stock *Whisper*, with the number of visits ranging from 2 to 6 before first purchase. Follow-up visits varied by subject and duration of the interaction, which were measured, as well as variables that were unmeasured by the program, such as the quality of the interaction and the baseline interest that a provider might have in female condoms. Convincing hesitant providers to purchase *Whisper* for the first time was one of the main challenges for the medical detailers, and one that required creativity and commitment to overcome. For example, the medical detailers would incentivize providers by offering discounts on bulk purchases, or would leave behind a large number of sample stock for providers to test with clients before committing to purchasing. They would also invite hesitant providers to attend brand promotion activities in city centers or at universities. The medical detailing team also collaborated with brand promoters to raise awareness at local companies such as tobacco companies and the national water agency to educate consumers and then link them to pharmacies that stocked *Whisper*. Using these techniques, the medical detailers were able to educate providers and also to demonstrate demand among consumers for the product.

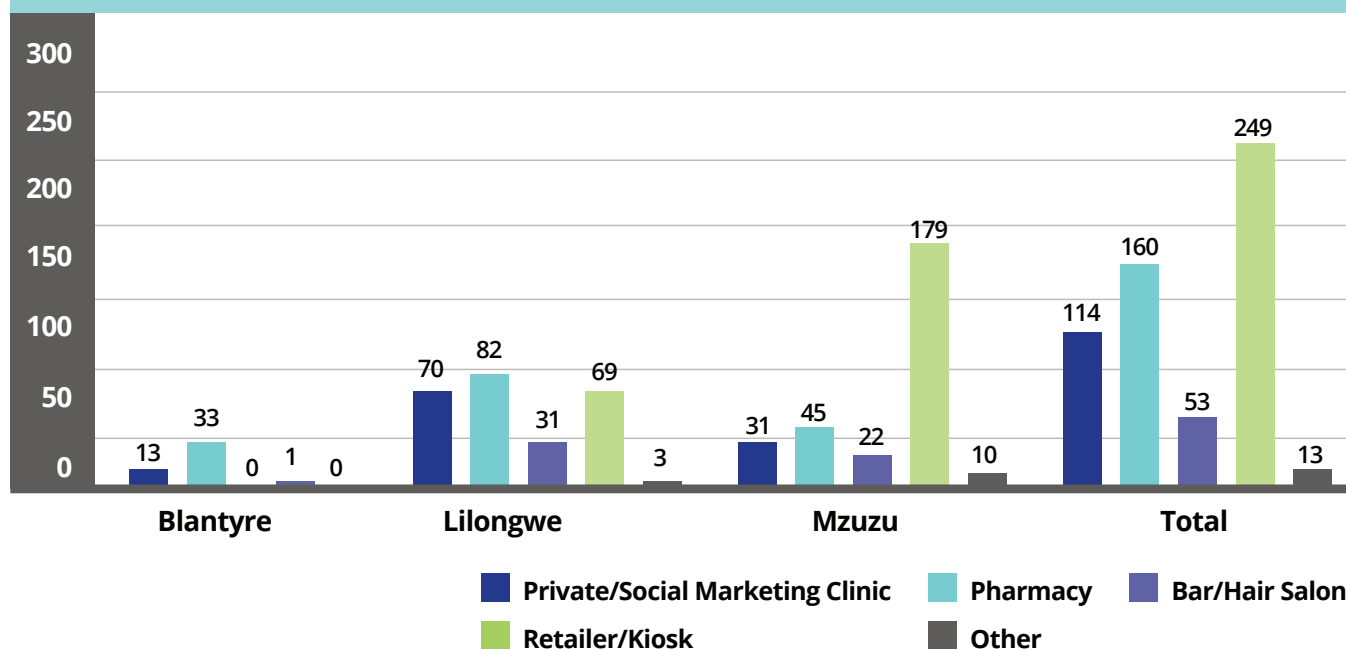
The mix of provider types that purchased *Whisper* was heavily skewed towards pharmacies and other retailers, rather than clinics – unsurprising given the low number of private clinics present in the three urban areas. The medical detailing program also saw a greater willingness to stock *Whisper* among pharmacies and other retail outlets such as kiosks, supermarkets, and petrol stations, probably because condom users are generally more likely to purchase condoms at fast-moving outlets than at clinics. Clients may want to purchase condoms outside of normal clinic operating hours (e.g., at night) or they may prefer a more anonymous or less time-consuming experience when purchasing this product.





While the majority of providers were willing to purchase a small number of *Whisper* units on the first training visit, a significant number of providers required multiple follow-up visits before they were convinced to stock *Whisper*.

Figure 4: Providers Stocking *Whisper* by Facility Type



From 2015 - 2018, the EECO project distributed a total of 23,400 units of *Whisper* in health clinics, pharmacies, kiosks, and other outlets in Malawi.

A goal of the medical detailing program was to understand successful strategies for decreasing provider barriers against the provision of female condoms. The first initiative of the medical detailing program was training providers on the technical aspects of *Whisper*, and on the benefits of female and male condoms in general.

Table 2: Total # of Providers Trained by Facility Type	Private Clinic	Pharmacy	Retailer/Kiosk	Bar/Hair Salon	Other
	148	325	60	22	36

Interactions with providers took a variety of forms over the life of the project and responded to the needs of individual providers. The medical detailing team found that the top five subjects of medical detailer/provider visits were:

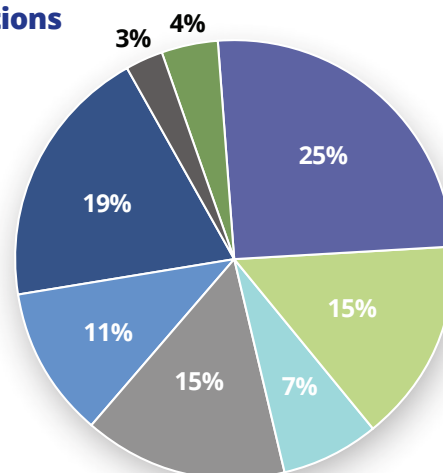
- » Stockouts/Preventing Stockouts of *Whisper* (25%),
- » Marketing/Promotion of *Whisper* (19%),
- » Improving Client Awareness of family planning (15%),
- » Social Interaction (no particular topic covered) (15%), and
- » Improving Client Access to family planning (11%).



Photo: PSI/Miguel Samper

Figure 5: Subject of Medical Detailer/Provider Interactions

- Stockouts/Preventing Stockout of *Whisper*
- Social Interaction (no particular topic covered)
- Product Technical Training
- Improving Client Awareness of FP
- Improving Client Access to FP
- Marketing/Promotion of *Whisper*
- Physical Infrastructure Issues
- Staffing/Management Issues



WCG medical detailers conducted knowledge tests with providers to assess their understanding of the product. The *Whisper* Condom Quiz included questions on product use and benefits, as well as questions that highlighted the differences between *Whisper* and other female condoms. For example, the FC2 female condom can be placed in the vagina many hours in advance of sex. *Whisper* is inserted just a few minutes before sex to ensure that the product remains stable in the vagina. On average, providers were able to answer 4.5 out of 7 questions correctly. The results of the *Whisper* Condom Quiz show that provider education is a critical component of product introduction. Many providers enrolled in the medical detailing program were reluctant to complete multiple product trainings after the first visit based on their self-assessed level of comfort with

A goal of the medical detailing program was to understand successful strategies for decreasing provider barriers against provision of female condoms.

the product. However, the knowledge tests show that one-off trainings are insufficient for long-term knowledge retention, so that the WCG medical detailers were encouraged to provide frequent on-site refresher trainings, to conduct *Whisper* Condom Quizzes on an ongoing basis, and to frequently discuss the technical aspects of the product with providers so that they could effectively counsel users on *Whisper* use and benefits.



Lessons Learned: Understanding and Engaging Providers

Overcoming stigma from previous experiences: One of the most common reasons given by providers for not wanting to purchase *Whisper* is their previous experience stocking female condoms. The medical detailers are challenged to convince these 'hesitant providers' that this new product has design features that differentiate it from other female condoms, and that these features may make the product more acceptable and/or attractive to some women and their partners. This message is a delicate balance, as the goal of EECO is not to replace the FC2 or other female condoms with *Whisper*, but rather to grow the overall female condom market. The EECO detailers ask providers to consider the many brands and varieties of male condoms available, and note that women should also have choices in female condoms. They highlight specific research findings from PATH about the acceptability of *Whisper* among couples, as well as research that shows that expanded options for contraception may increase overall use of contraception.

Linking demand generation and medical detailing: Providers are hesitant to purchase *Whisper* before they see demand from consumers. Given the sensitive nature of condoms, the unknown nature of a new product, and existing female condom stigma, it is unlikely that the target audience will proactively request *Whisper* where they do not see it on the shelves. A key strategy for the team is linking demand generation activities with the outlets that are stocking *Whisper*, so that consumers know where to purchase *Whisper*, and providers are encouraged to continue selling the product due to its popularity among consumers.

Real-time responses to on-the-ground challenges: The level and amount of data that are collected by the WCG medical detailing team allow a unique view into trends over time for perceptions and beliefs around female condoms. The data collection system tracks individual providers as well as categories of providers, and can quickly indicate any needed course-adjustments in the approach. This strategy was useful in flagging urgent program needs such as clarifications for training materials or additional promotional materials.

Fast-moving commodities receive less attention from vendors: Providers in Malawi tend to have busy schedules. Medical detailers struggle to engage the attention of providers for long periods of time and to build the type of long-term relationships that are needed for values clarification and behavior change. One reason for this is that *Whisper* is a fast-moving good. Like other condoms, providers are comfortable putting it on their shelf and seeing whether it sells, without much need for engaging consumers or coaching them on how to use the product. In addition, the condom has no side effects, so providers do not expect to see customers returning to discuss any issues they may have had with the product.

This fact is evident in the types of facilities that stock *Whisper*, of which the majority are pharmacies and retail outlets rather than clinics. The challenge for medical detailers was ensuring that pharmacy and retail staff (including in kiosks and supermarkets) were able to counsel users on *Whisper* and to answer questions about the product.



Conclusions and Recommendations

Medical providers and other vendors of family planning products play a key role in creating access to contraceptive and dual protection methods while reducing social barriers to their use. Through intensive medical detailing, EECO works to decrease stigma around female condoms by training private sector providers and increasing awareness among the community about the variety of female condoms available. By analyzing and addressing the concerns of providers in real-time, EECO hopes to foster a cadre of clinicians, pharmacists, retailers and other vendors who are well-informed, supportive advocates of a woman's right to choose a contraceptive method that fits her needs and lifestyle.

Key recommendations for replication of this strategy:

1. Make use of inexpensive data tools to capture program developments in real-time. One of the greatest strengths of this program was the ability to respond quickly to opportunities or points of concern.
2. For new products that require intensive promotion, introduction efforts should closely link supply and demand activities so that consumers have easy access to points-of-sale from well-trained providers.

Other recommendations based on the EECO experience:

1. A long-term champion provider engagement strategy was not budgeted under the medical detailing initiative. Engaging enthusiastic local providers in a more systematic way may have increased uptake of *Whisper* among providers.
2. Programs should budget for generous amounts of sample stock that can be given to providers and consumers. One of the main pieces of feedback that the EECO team received on a weekly basis is that customers and providers want to see, touch, or try a product for free before investing in it.
3. Providers were excited about the product as something “new” that they could offer to their consumers. In future programs, highlighting new features or design interventions may be an effective strategy for garnering support among providers. For example, applying stickers to packages and promotional materials that say “NEW” in bold lettering could draw attention to the product.
4. While the detailers were trained to discuss the global acceptability studies conducted by the Woman's Condom developer (PATH), Malawian providers were more interested in whether the product was acceptable among Malawians. With the right resources, it may be an effective strategy to conduct brief in-country acceptability studies such that the findings may be shared locally.

EXPANDING EFFECTIVE CONTRACEPTIVE OPTIONS
IN MALAWI TO INCLUDE THE WOMAN'S CONDOM:

UNDERSTANDING THE PROVIDER