

CEO Message

For many generations, taking on responsibility has been a characteristic element of the culture and the actions of Merck, whether with respect to our products, our employees, the environment, or society. In particular, we aim to help improve sustainable access to high-quality health solutions for underserved populations and communities in low and middle income countries, in partnership with local stakeholders.

Therefore I am very pleased to announce the start of the “**More than a Mother**” and the “**Fertility is a Shared Responsibility**” initiatives as part of the **Merck Capacity Advancement Program (CAP)**, in collaboration with the University of Nairobi. These two initiatives are very important for Merck as the world leader in Fertility management, and for me personally as a woman and a physician.

The program will not only provide medical education and awareness for medical students and healthcare providers, but it will also address the need for interventions to reduce stigmatization and social suffering of infertile women and raise awareness about male infertility and the necessity for a team approach to family building among couples.

The program will also address key challenges that are associated with resource-constrained settings, such as the prevention of infertility. Lower levels of socio-economic development are thought to be associated with higher levels of non-genetic and preventable causes of infertility such as poor nutrition, untreated sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unsafe abortion, consequence of infections caused by the practice of female genital mutilation and smoking. Hence prevention awareness is very important and should be integrated within HIV prevention, family planning and mother care programs.

A central difficulty associated with infertility is that infertility can transform from an acute, private distress into a harsh, public stigma with complex and devastating consequences. In some cultures, childless women still suffer discrimination, stigma and ostracism. An inability to have a child or to become pregnant can result in being greatly ostracized, isolated, disinherited or assaulted. This may result in divorce or physical and psychological violence which personally makes me very sad. But I am quite sure that through the “**More than a Mother**” initiative, together with you - the future healthcare leaders - we will challenge the perception of infertile women, their roles and worth in society, both within and beyond the medical profession in order to achieve a systemic shift in the current culture of gender discrimination in the context of fertility care in African societies.

Although male factors contribute to about half of all cases of infertility, women are overwhelmingly perceived as being the party responsible for a couple's infertility, and subsequently the social suffering associated with infertility tends to be greater for them than their husbands. Through the “**Fertility is a Shared Responsibility**” initiative, we aim to contribute to raising awareness about male infertility and encourage men to acknowledge and openly discuss their infertility issues and strive for a gender-neutral approach to family building with their partners, in order to progress toward Shared Fertility Responsibility among couples

I believe that access to adequate comprehensive reproductive health services, including infertility care, is a basic right regardless of the economic circumstances in which individuals are born into. Therefore, the Merck Fertility Capacity Advancement Program will contribute to identifying and implementing strategies to improve access to high-quality biomedical fertility care in Africa and to defining interventions to decrease social suffering from infertility and childlessness.



Belén Garijo CEO Merck Healthcare

Together we can create a Culture Shift.

I wish you find the program valuable and I am looking forward to meeting you on the 22nd of June.

Belén Garijo, MD
Member of the Executive Board
CEO Merck Healthcare