

Merck KGaA gives back to society through Merck Foundation's program to improve access to Cancer Care.

A bright future through Merck Foundation explained by the candidates we interviewed from Ghana, Kenya, Zambia and Ethiopia.

NAIROBI, KENYA, October 12, 2017 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Many efforts lately have started to address the emerging cancer crisis in Africa and developing countries. One of the strong players in these efforts is Merck Foundation, a subsidiary of Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany. They have started a very important Cancer Access program since 2016 to provide Africa with New Oncologists through a one, two and three-year Oncology Fellowship Program established in India, Kenya and Egypt.

We heard from the candidates who have been enrolled in this unique program— what they think about it and what it means for them, their patients, countries and their patients.

From Ghana: “A Bright Future through Merck Foundation “Dr. Kokou Hefoume Amegan-Aho, Paediatric Medical Oncology started his emotional story explaining, “This is a very special opportunity offered by Merck Foundation to help in addressing the numerous challenges in managing childhood cancers in Ghana and the rest of Africa, especially the inadequate number of trained specialists in paediatric oncology as well as improving diagnosis and care. I am more excited about the future as this training will help unearth undiagnosed cases, while increasing awareness; increase survival through early diagnosis and multidisciplinary management. I will be very active in research activities in the area to fill the knowledge gaps.” He added.

He further explained what he meant by the missing opportunities in Arica, “Children affected by cancer have a lot of potential, we are missing as a nation by not keeping most, if not all, of them alive. During my rotation on the paediatric oncology ward of the Korle Bu Teaching Hospital, I had the privilege to “befriend” many children, gifted with special skills, and full of big dreams for their future. Unfortunately, many are not alive today. I still keep the drawings and the stories of most of them in my house and in my heart, wishing my friends were still alive!”

“Currently, the survival rate from childhood cancer in Ghana, like other lower and middle-income countries is even lower than that in the USA in the 1960s. In Ghana, children with cancer die



From left Dr Nixon explains a point to Chairman of the Executive Board of the Merck, Prof. Frank Stangenberg-Haverkamp, Uganda Minister of Health, Hon. Sarah Opendi, Dr Rasha

undiagnosed or present very late, due to the low awareness and inadequate diagnostic services in our country. Children with cancer are likely to be managed for other common illness in health facilities or parents seeking help from herbalists and spiritualists for many weeks or months.” He emphasized.

Dr. Kokou added, “It is therefore clear that increasing awareness, training more health workers in childhood cancer management; mobilizing funds for early diagnosis and treatment are key to improving childhood cancer outcomes in Ghana.”

This was not the only testimony we heard about Merck Foundation efforts to support those young doctors to be oncologists and help the patients in their countries.

We met with Dr. Rasha Kelej, CEO of Merck Foundation in Uganda lately at the launch of this program in East Africa, she explained to us the vision and call of action of Merck Foundation, “One of the main objectives of Merck foundation is to build a strong platform of qualified medical, pediatric and surgical oncologists across the continent through the Merck Africa Oncology Fellowship Program”.

“More than twenty candidates from Uganda, Zambia, Ethiopia, Namibia, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Tanzania and Kenya have enrolled in the Merck Africa Oncology Fellowship Program in partnership with African ministries of health, the University of Nairobi, Kenya, Tata Memorial Centre, India and Alexandria University, Egypt. We are very proud of our contribution to lead Africa to a better future through changing the landscape of Cancer care in the continent.” Dr. Rasha Kelej added.

Prof. Frank Stangenberg- Haverkamp, Chairman of Executive Board and Chairman of Board of Trustees of Merck Foundation explained during his meeting with H.E. Prime minister of Uganda “Improving cancer care needs a substantial improvement in infrastructure and increase in the number of specialized workforce, which does not exist in many, if not most, Sub-Saharan African countries. Enrolling more candidates from more African countries into our Fellowship Program, is an important step forward towards improving access to cancer care across the continent.”



Dr. Kokou Hefoume Amegan-Aho, Ghana Paediatric Medical Oncology



Dr. Nihad Salifu, Pediatric Oncologist from Ghana

In June 2017, BIO Ventures for Global Health (BVGH), and the African Organization for Research and Training in Cancer (AORTIC) released a white paper on the African continent's emerging cancer crisis.

Over 20% of African countries have no access to cancer treatments at all, while access is limited and sporadic in other countries. Later-stage diagnosis in African patients contributes to poorer outcomes. For example, 5-year female breast cancer relative survival rates are 46% in Uganda and 12% in The Gambia, compared with around 90% in developed countries, the report cited.

More African young doctors and researchers are grateful every day for this program from Merck Foundation; we have watched on social media this video tells us the [experience](#) of both Dr. Nihad Saifu from Ghana and Dr. Christine from Tanzania.

Here is another video sharing testimonies of candidates from the [oncology fellowship at the University of Nairobi](#) from South Africa and Kenya.

We have also interviewed Dr. Alemayehu from Ethiopia who has shared his thoughts with us saying "Merck Africa Oncology Fellowship Program is a Golden path to tackle the growing challenge posed by Cancer in Africa. My people are also in great need of specialists like this to address their sufferings. For your surprise, there is no oncologist, even a single one in southern part of Ethiopia with an estimated population of 18 million. For that matter, there are only 3 oncologists in Ethiopia for about 100 million population." He added.

Dr. Natnael explained "Cancer care is not only about the expensive resources; it is also about a trained healthcare personnel capable of addressing prevention, early diagnosis, and treatment and able to provide palliative care to cancer patients. So human resource capacity building is a core in tackling the burden posed by cancer. In this regard, Merck Africa Oncology Fellowship program already took the lion share in my country and the rest of Africa in general."

Lizbeth Kariuki
For Africa
+254721993001
[email us here](#)

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