

# Merck Foundation marks World Cancer Day by increasing the limited number of oncologists in Africa

NAIROBI, KENYA, February 6, 2019 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Merck Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Merck KGaA Germany marks 'World Cancer Day 2019' themed 'I am and I will' through their Cancer Access Program with the aim to improve patient's access to quality and equitable cancer care in Africa.

"We are committed to lead Africa to a better future through changing the landscape of Cancer care in the continent. We have been actively working to achieve objectives of building professional capacity with the aim to increase the limited number of oncologists" emphasized Dr. Rasha Kelej, CEO of Merck Foundation.

"The lack of financial means is not the only challenge, I strongly believe the scarcity of trained health care personnel is the main challenge, therefore our main strategy is to establish a strong platform of specialized oncologists across the continent, specifically in countries where there is not even a single oncologists till today, such as: Gambia, Central African Republic, Liberia, Guinea Conakry and Sierra Leone. They need them to tackle the prevention, early diagnosis and management of cancer at all levels of the health care systems. Through this program, Merck Foundation has enrolled and provided clinical training in Oncology to 57 candidates from more than 21 African countries. We will soon scale up and strengthen our efforts and activities in more countries", emphasized Dr. Rasha Kelej.

Merck Foundation through its Merck Cancer Access Program has provided training to over 57 candidates from Botswana, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Conakry, Kenya, Liberia, Mauritius, Namibia, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

As per data and research, 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.

Therefore Merck foundation partnership with African Government and academia was the right strategy to address this pressing issue, the Merck Cancer access Program was launched in 2016 to provide One-year and two year fellowship program at Tata Memorial Centre - India, two years Oncology Fellowship programs at University of Malaya - Malaysia, Two years Oncology



**Merck Foundation**

**Dr. Angela McLigeyo,**  
Medical Oncology Fellow  
Merck Foundation Alumni  
Kenya

"The need to improve the quality of cancer care in Kenya is critical. Especially in the setting of the growing cancer burden in Kenya and the high mortality rates that accompanies it. Also, the majority of cancer patients in Kenya have to travel out of the country to seek treatment due to high local treatment costs and the shortage of specialists.

The 'Merck Africa Oncology Fellowship Program' in partnership with the University of Nairobi, aptly suits our need of increasing the number of trained oncologists in the continent."

**Merck Cancer Access Program**

Fellowship Program at University of Nairobi - Kenya and Two years Master degree in Medical Oncology at Cairo University – Egypt.

It is an on-going initiative as the aim is to build cancer care capacity and will be scaled up to more African and developing countries.

Merck Foundation also provides Cancer access and scientific sessions for more than 1000 healthcare providers during their annual conference, Merck Africa Asia Luminary which was held last year in Senegal, presided by THE PRESIDENT OF SENEGAL, H.E. MACKY SALL. Ten African First ladies and 12 Ministers of health were meeting in different panels and committees to review the strategy of Merck Foundation programs to build healthcare capacity in different fields with special focus on Cancer care in long term partnership with their countries.

Join Merck Foundation online community to exchange experience and information with other healthcare providers, researchers, students, policy makers and community members in Africa and beyond [www.merck-foundation.com](http://www.merck-foundation.com) free registration

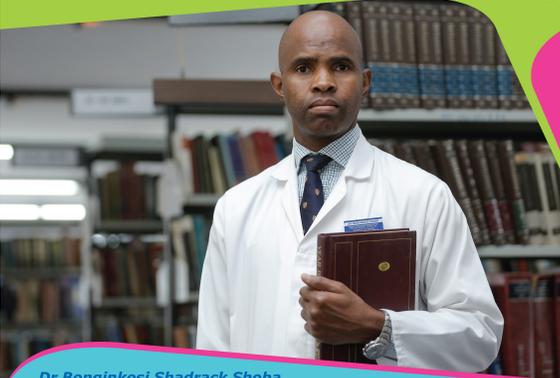
#### About Merck Foundation

The Merck Foundation, established in 2017, is the philanthropic arm of Merck KGaA Germany, aims to improve the health and wellbeing of people and advance their lives through science and technology. Our efforts are primarily focused on improving access to innovative healthcare solutions in underserved communities, building healthcare and scientific research capacity and empowering people in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) with a special focus on women and youth. All Merck Foundation press releases are distributed by e-mail at the same time they become available on the Merck Foundation Website. Please go to [www.merck-foundation.com](http://www.merck-foundation.com) to read more and/or register online to interact and exchange experience with our registered members.

#### About Merck

Merck is a leading science and technology company in healthcare, life science and performance materials. Almost 53,000 employees work to further develop technologies that improve and enhance life – from biopharmaceutical therapies to treat cancer or multiple sclerosis, cutting-edge systems for scientific research and production, to liquid crystals for smartphones and LCD televisions. In 2017, Merck generated sales of € 15.3 billion in 66 countries.

Founded in 1668, Merck is the world's oldest pharmaceutical and chemical company. The founding family remains the majority owner of the publicly listed corporate group. Merck holds



**Dr. Bonginkosi Shadrack Shoba**  
Medical Oncology Fellow  
Merck Foundation Alumni  
South Africa 

"South Africa has not more than a mere handful of oncologists, all of them in Johannesburg, Cape Town or Durban. There are no dedicated oncology centres even in these big cities. There is currently one public stem cell centre in Cape Town that caters to three patients at a time. Sad but true, a diagnosis of any form of cancer including early-stage Hodgkins lymphoma in South Africa carries a swift, cruel death sentence, particularly so if you happen to reside in a rural area, as about 80% of South Africa's population does. Therefore, Merck Oncology Fellowship program at the University of Nairobi will help me to transform the lives of those black, poor, rural, young folk I watch dying mercilessly, avoidable deaths from even easily treatable Hodgkin's lymphoma in my country."

#### Merck Cancer Access Program



**Dr. Natnael Alemayehu**  
Adult Medical Oncology Fellow  
Merck Foundation Alumnus  
Ethiopia

"Currently, there is not even a single oncologist in Southern part of Ethiopia with an estimated population of 18 million. There are only three oncologists in Ethiopia for about 100 million population. Merck Oncology Fellowship Program is a golden path to tackle the growing challenge posed by cancer in Africa. I was delighted to know about and to be part of it. By completing this fellowship program, I feel that I will not only further my career, but I will also be a critical asset to my country and my people to address their suffering."

**Merck Cancer Access Program:**  
Builds cancer care capacity with the aim to increase the limited number of Oncologists across Africa.

Under this program, Merck Foundation in partnership with Ministries of Health and academia across the continent, provides one and two-year Oncology Fellowship Programs.

Since 2016, more than 30 healthcare providers from over 15 African countries such as, Niger, Chad, Guinea, Gambia, Kenya, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Liberia, Botswana, South Africa, Zambia, Namibia, Mauritius and Ghana, have enrolled into this program with the aim to improve access to quality and equitable cancer care in their countries.

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#### Merck Cancer Access Program

the global rights to the Merck name and brand. The only exceptions are the United States and Canada, where the company operates as EMD Serono, MilliporeSigma.

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