

Merck launches "Merck More Than a Mother" campaign in Uganda

Merck (www.Merckgroup.com), a leading science and technology company, have announced the launch of its second "Merck More than a Mother" campaign in Africa for the first time in Uganda as part of the Merck Capacity Advancement Program.

The campaign was first implemented in Kenya in 2015 and will be implemented this year in Uganda, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, Africa Fertility Society (AFS) and the Uganda Women Parliamentary Association, and progressively rolled-out in more African countries.



Hon. Sarah Opendi and Rasha Kelej, Chief social Officer of Merck giving a wooden shield

“In some cultures, childless women still suffer discrimination, stigma and ostracism. As such, a central difficulty associated with infertility is that it can transform from an acute, private distress into a harsh public stigma with complex and devastating consequences. An inability to have a child or to become pregnant can result in being greatly isolated, disinherited or assaulted. This may result in divorce or physical and psychological violence. Therefore this campaign is very important for Africa since it aims to define interventions to reduce the stigma and social suffering of infertile women across the continent,” said Rasha Kelej, chief social officer, Merck Healthcare.

The Ugandan Minister of State and Health, Hon. Sarah Opendi emphasised during her speech at the campaign: “We are happy to partner with reputable and innovative companies such as Merck. We believe that improving access to regulated and equitable fertility care is important, but it is even more important to intervene to decrease stigmatisation and social suffering arising from this condition”.

“According to the World Health Organization (WHO), lower levels of 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, exposure to smoking and to leaded petrol and other environmental pollutants. Hence prevention awareness is very important”, Opendi added.

The campaign will provide training for embryologists and education for healthcare providers and will also support governments to define policies to improve access to safe and effective fertility care, address the need for interventions to reduce stigmatisation and social suffering of infertile women and raise awareness about male infertility and the necessity for a team approach to family building among couples.

Themed "Together we can create a culture shift", the “Merck More than a Mother” social media campaign will challenge the social and cultural perception of infertile women in Africa. Moreover it will raise awareness about male infertility, prevention of infertility and infertility management at large.

Dr. James Olobo-Lalobo, Vice-President of Africa Fertility Society stressed: “Through this historic campaign, “Merck More than a Mother”, we will challenge the perception about infertile women, their roles and worth in society, both within and beyond the medical profession in order to achieve any systemic shift in the current culture of gender discrimination in the context of fertility care.”

Through this campaign Merck, a pioneer in reproductive health, will address together with local stakeholders, the key challenges that are associated with resource-constrained settings such as prevention of infertility, education and self-development, regulation of assisted reproductive technology (ART) and in-vitro fertilization (IVF), geographic barriers, reproductive rights and over-population and limited resources arguments.



Group photo with Fertility patients and Minister of Health , Sarah opendi, Hon. Bety Amongi, MP

Dr. Oladapo Adenrele Ashiru, President of Africa Fertility Society explained: “In Nigeria where I practice, infertility is caused by infections in over 85% of women, like in the rest of Africa, compared to 33% worldwide which emphasises the importance of prevention programmes in Africa. Therefore our partnership with Merck is very essential to address this sensitive topic for the first time in the continent”. “We are going to host this important campaign in Nigeria and many other African countries this year,” he added.

During the event, Merck announced the appointment of Hon. Sarah Opendi, Uganda's Minister of State of Health, to be the ambassador of "Merck More Than a Mother" in Uganda in recognition for her support and efforts to reduce the stigma of infertility and raise awareness about the condition in the country.

At the launch event, Merck awarded Berna Amulen, a Ugandan woman, who openly shared her story of stigmatisation and suffering for being infertile. The award was in recognition of her courage in creating awareness and sharing her devastating experience so that no other woman would suffer the same.

Hon. Joyce Lay, Member of Parliament and ambassador of the campaign in Kenya, has joined hands with Uganda Ministry of Health and Uganda Women Parliamentary Association to raise awareness about male infertility. Lay emphasised: "In order to improve access to safe and effective fertility care, a discussion with the relevant authorities will be needed to discuss the strengthening of infertility services, education, auditing, regulation, community awareness and the need to integrate them in programs which already exist in the local health infrastructure."

Kelej urged the Ugandan stakeholders to join the social media campaign in order to reduce the stigma of infertility, create awareness and define interventions to improve access to better fertility care in Africa. "Let your voice heard and let's work together to create a culture shift," Kelej added.

Take a moment and watch these two videos of infertile women sharing their experience of stigma and social suffering in Uganda:

To read more about Merck More than a mother concept and objectives please [click here](#).

Distributed by APO (African Press Organization) on behalf of Merck KGaA.

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