

Remarks by Dr. Julie Gerberding, President, Merck Vaccines

White Ribbon Alliance's "Wake Up" to Maternal Health Breakfast

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Good morning, and thank you, Sarah, for that lovely introduction. But also thank you for your championship of this cause. This is a remarkably important initiative, and an organization that I'm really proud that Merck can be a partner of. I was thinking, "Why is this so meaningful to me, personally?" And I have three little scenarios that came into my mind. The first time I ever visited Africa was long before I was in government, or in the private sector, and I was involved with an organization at the University of California San Francisco, trying to do something about the early HIV problems in sub-Saharan Africa. And I visited a teaching hospital in Uganda, which at one time had been an extraordinary hospital but had suffered the consequences of the war there. I went to the maternity ward, and it was so distressing that I actually was physically ill. There was no water; there were many, many patients who were basically abandoned. There was no opportunity for blood transfusion. It was a catastrophe, and I just couldn't believe that something like that could exist in a world that has so much medicine in the developed nations' hospitals.

The second scenario happened a few years later when I was in Afghanistan, and I was in a large hospital in Kabul. Imagine: six babies in one bed, with six moms in one bed. What does that mean for infectious disease transmission? What does that mean for the risk that those brand-new, most vulnerable infants and their mothers experience? Six babies in one bed.

The last scenario, I think, is probably one of the most difficult to talk about, and that's the scenario in another hospital in sub-Saharan Africa, where I went to the hospital and I was visiting some of the AIDS programs there, but off in the corner, there was a baby in a basket. I said, "Whose baby is that?" Well, that baby's mother had just died, and there was nobody there to take the baby, nobody to care for that baby, and that baby was destined to go to an orphanage at best.

So when you think about these stories, they are just one person's "peek and shriek" anecdotes from experiencing the front line. And then you see these incredible women who are basically holding the world in their hands, and really doing more than we can possibly imagine doing something about this problem. It's just a wonderful, wonderful resource, and something that I think the WRA should take great pride in supporting, but also, great motivation for doing even more. And that's why I'm happy to be here to represent Merck, because I think it's a company that wants to step up to the plate and try to do more. We are announcing this week – our CEO, Ken Frazier, is announcing – a 500 million dollar commitment to help support better maternal outcomes around the world. (applause)

It's one partnership, one step. I know there are many other companies that are going to step up, or are stepping up to do the same thing. But I think we all collectively recognize that we have a responsibility to help the health workers who are on the front line have the tools and the knowledge and the experiences that they need to save lives. Merck is dedicating a team of scientists to try to help find new tools and technologies for the three most common causes of maternal mortality: hemorrhage, eclampsia, and the consequences of multiple births. We're working on finding ways that work in the field to stop bleeding. We're working on new diagnostics to detect pre-eclampsia early enough and

cheaply enough to make it useful to women. And we hope that we'll be able to find family planning tools that make sense and are accessible to people everywhere.

Most importantly, I think, at Merck, we're beginning to mobilize our own employees, not just the women, but the men and the women, to recognize that we are part of this global community, and we do want to do more to really make a world where motherhood is safe for everyone. So thank you so much.