

Giada Burkhalter-Chiaruttini of Cerbios-Pharma talks to LSKH

In its series of interviews with women in science, LSKH spoke to the Human Resources Director of Switzerland-based Cerbios-Pharma SA, which specialises in the development and manufacture of both chemical and biological APIs for its partners worldwide.

Q. Who inspired you, as a younger woman, and what advice would you give to young women aspiring to follow your path?

A. My family provided me with positive role models in women who pursued professional careers, inspiring me to follow suit. These examples instilled in me a clear vision of my professional aspirations, motivating me to consistently strive for excellence. My experiences at Cerbios have fostered personal and professional growth, allowing me to flourish as an individual and a professional.

To young women, I offer these words of advice: cultivate curiosity, embrace learning from both positive and negative experiences, actively engage in experimentation and exploration, and only through these endeavours will you uncover areas for improvement and discover your passions.

In addition, I encourage them to value their unique qualities and strengths, transforming them into their greatest assets. Self-evaluation is crucial for continuous professional development, enabling them to elevate their skills and achievements.

Q. How important is it to educate and mentor emerging female leaders in the industry?

A. Cerbios is committed to creating diverse and inclusive teams, recognising that mixed teams bring a wealth of perspectives and experiences that contribute to success. We have been actively working to achieve a balance in female representation and have established development programs specifically designed to support the growth and professional development of female leaders.



Giada Burkhalter-Chiaruttini

This ongoing endeavour is deeply embedded in our company culture and extends beyond mere quotas. We believe that fostering an inclusive environment where women feel valued and empowered not only benefits the company's overall performance, but also attracts and retains top female talent.

Our leadership team is dedicated to creating an environment where women have equal opportunities to pursue their career aspirations, whether it's through vertical progression to senior leadership roles or horizontal expansion into new areas of expertise. We recognise that individual skills, knowledge and contributions are paramount, and we strive to create a workplace where everyone feels respected and appreciated regardless of gender or any other personal characteristics.

Q. Have you observed or experienced any barriers to gaining opportunities

that support career progression in the pharmaceutical field such as how individuals are selected for involvement in international activities, on committees, as team leaders or in other roles?

A. Bias can create barriers and Cerbios has addressed this issue by implementing company-wide training programs to combat unconscious bias and toxic behaviours. These training programs have been instrumental in fostering a healthy, motivating and respectful work environment for all employees. Barriers in the industry are gradually diminishing thanks to the increasing number of women pursuing education and careers in the pharmaceutical sector. As evidenced by the 2019 federal statistics on gender distribution in university education, women are increasingly participating in fields that were once dominated by men.

Q. Does your place of work put emphasis on diversity and inclusion, and promote the concept of woman in leadership?

A. Much of the workforce has been employed online or in a 'Working from Home' arrangement for the past couple of years.

Q. Have you noticed whether this new way of working has improved or hindered the situation of women in the workplace?

A. The Covid-19 pandemic presented Cerbios with an opportunity to refine and implement new work models that better align with the needs of women seeking to balance work and family responsibilities. By adopting smart working, part-time arrangements and flexible time management practices, Cerbios has created a work environment that is highly valued by its employees. These efforts have been recognised with Cerbios's

second 'Pro-Familia' certification, awarded for its commitment to creating a family-friendly workplace.

This new approach to work has also opened up new possibilities for collaboration with companies in far-flung locations. With remote work options, Cerbios can now tap into a wider talent pool and establish partnerships with organisations that would have been previously inaccessible due to geographical constraints. This has expanded the company's reach and broadened its opportunities for growth and innovation.

Q. To conclude this interview, in your opinion, what can we do to increase female participation in the pharmaceutical/biotech field?

A. I believe that sharing success stories and showcasing the diverse career paths available in our industry is crucial for engaging and inspiring young students. Cerbios actively participates in school

outreach programs to explain our training pathways and offer internship opportunities to aspiring female scientists. This is essential to attract and retain more women in our field. We also believe it is vital to amplify the voices of professionally successful women by inviting them to speak at universities or leveraging media platforms to share their experiences.

Furthermore, Cerbios has a long history of training apprentices in the fields of biology and chemistry. In line with our commitment to gender equality, we strive to provide equal opportunities for all genders, especially young girls. After completing their apprenticeship, they can choose to pursue further education at specialised universities or directly enter the workforce. This unique training program, which combines half-time work experience with half-time schooling, allows students to gain practical skills while making informed decisions about their future career paths.