

# KARIN BLUMER

HEAD COMMUNICATION AND PATIENT RELATIONS,  
CELL AND GENE THERAPY EUROPE

**K**arin Blumer's early education was female, from a girls only secondary school to veterinary medicine, where nearly 90% of fellow-students were women. However, she felt a strong passion for science so she started a PhD researching feline AIDS. She had a promising compound, which she wanted to test as quickly as possible, leading her to the question of the ethics of animal research.

## Ethics of animal research

Karin dropped her bench work to investigate animal research ethics at the philosophy school, Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich, working in a 50:50 male to female environment for the first time. This PhD completion led to a second study on risk assessment ethics.

'Publish, present and obtain funding' is the mantra for academics in their 30s. In her time, the academic system favored high-performing non-parents and is set up for women to fail. (For this reason, Karin says, the HBP gender equality programme is particularly valuable.) Private industry, in contrast, can allow some part time working without losing promotion prospects.

At age 29, two PhDs made childless Karin look super-academic and unemployable. Potential hiring companies balked at paying statutory maternity leave. Then Karin found a hiring manager whose confidence in her was sufficient to accommodate her expectations in life.

## Blending family and professional life

Karin encountered the gender issue early. Her mother wanted to be a neurosurgeon, but gave up the idea of medical school on marriage, due to social conventions. The most stressful time in child-raising is the first 6-7 years; Karin cannot see why a woman's whole professional life is defined by this short period, given current growing life expectancy.

To the next generation, Karin notes that other females can impede your success, and counsels, "women need to help each other to overcome the initial biological reaction to fight other women that results from continual competition for the attention of men." To contemporary young women, she opines, "To be fully autonomous, women must have their own money, life and career - otherwise they will never be free," while advising against completely stopping a career to have children.

Karin and her close female business friends in their late 40s or early 50s now face perplexing questions. Men as they age can simply don similar suits. But when there is such a big focus on youth, it is unclear how a woman ages gracefully. Should they dye their hair? How long can they wear high heels or short skirts? Today, Karin is still trailblazing by formulating satisfactory answers for the future.



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