



RESEARCH2REALITY

Shining a light on research & innovation.

One Doctor's Mission: Safer Pregnancies Worldwide

An interview with **José Belizán**

2023 John Dirks Canada Gairdner Global Health Award laureate

I used to see a lot of women very worried about developing pregnancy hypertension — that is a very severe disease that involves around 50,000 women dying every year in the world, and half a million children dying every year in the world.

I was surprised that the ancestors of the Mayan Indigenous population have a very low incidence of this serious complication of pregnancy. So I started to think, "What's going on here?" And then seeing the diet of the women, all the components of the nutrients are very low — like calories, etc., etc. But surprisingly, they have a very high consumption of calcium. And I said, "Could there be any relationship between these two peculiarities?" And we started a long series of research, and we really showed that there is a relationship between calcium intake and blood pressure. After that we did a big study; we demonstrated that women receiving a supplement of calcium compared with women receiving a placebo have lower incidence of pregnancy complication, also called preeclampsia.

In our dream, it's that every woman before and during pregnancy could have a good calcium intake, and could be mediated by pills, but also we're working on fortification of wheat, flour, and also we are working on fortification of water.

Providing health is something that really — everybody knows how important is health for everybody. So we feel really very pleased about that, to be

TODAY'S RESEARCH. TOMORROW'S REALITY.



recognized by such a committee, such a prestigious committee — it really was for us an amazing surprise, unbelievable. The Gairdner Award signified for us the validation of what we have done, and also to continue what we are doing.