

Written evidence submitted by The Tropical Health & Education Trust (THET) to the Commons Select Committee inquiry “Follow-up to Responses to the Ebola Crisis”

Executive Summary

In answer to the question ‘*What can be done to address such issues in the future?*’ THET would like to ask the members of the Committee to consider the following:

- The national and international responses to the Ebola epidemic highlight the important task of building resilience into health systems for the longer term. We have all seen the crucial role played by volunteers from the UK health sector in response to the crisis. Greater emphasis now needs to be placed on supporting and training health workers (in those affected regions and beyond) for the longer term, building preventative capacity and ensuring that countries have a health workforce that is fit for purpose.
- Health partnerships access the vast pool of expertise available within the UK healthcare sector to strengthen health worker training, professional institutions and standards. THET can demonstrate the validity of the health partnership approach in a range of contexts, including the role these collaborations can play in infection prevention and control and patient safety. While health partnerships are not designed to form part of an aid response, they are also proving valuable in humanitarian situations as they already have an established network of relationships and ‘a presence on the ground’.
- The International Development Committee’s (IDC) report on DFID’s work on strengthening developing country health systems commends HPS but it also says that its level of funding is ‘a drop in the ocean’. THET anticipates that existing and forthcoming research and evaluation from our own work and by DFID will constitute a ‘proof of concept’ for health partnerships. We will be seeking a marked increase in funding for the partnership approach, arguing that this will enable DFID to make a significant contribution to achieving universal health coverage (SDG3) and also prevent and manage infections such as Ebola.

Introduction

1. THET is a global health organisation that trains and supports health workers through partnerships, enabling people in low- and middle-income countries to access essential healthcare. In close collaboration with in-country partners and government, we deliver capacity building programmes to strengthen the health workforce and support the health system in Zambia and Somaliland. From the United Kingdom (UK), we provide training, advice and grant support for health worker education and training partnerships involving more than 200 UK and overseas hospitals, universities and professional associations.
2. THET’s largest programme, the DFID-funded Health Partnership Scheme (HPS), currently uses the expertise of UK health professionals and health institutions to build the capacity of their counterparts in 26 developing countries (including 17 DFID focal countries). Since HPS began four years ago, it has provided training to almost 40,000 developing country health workers, with women accounting for over half of the participants. In tests, 91% of those trained have improved their knowledge or skills. 1,490 UK health workers have volunteered overseas as part of this work; when surveyed, over 90% of respondents reported improved performance in the UK, either in their own assessment or following an annual appraisal.
3. HPS has helped draft over 500 improved clinical guidelines, policies or curricula, and 114 overseas health institutions have already implemented one or more. Almost 400 health institutions report improved quality of health services provided to patients. These projects address the full spectrum of health issues in low and middle income countries and complement other DFID health initiatives by making the most of the expertise and experience the UK has to offer.

Health Partnerships responding to Ebola

4. The Ebola epidemic has served as a devastating reminder of the wider need to improve the resilience of health institutions to cope with infectious disease outbreaks. HPS has recently awarded grants specifically aimed at improving Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) measures in overseas health facilities. Applying guidelines developed in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), these projects will strengthen the capacity of the overseas country's health services to cope with future outbreak and emergency situations associated with highly infectious diseases alongside the effective delivery of essential day-to-day health services. They will centre on the implementation of internationally recognised preventative measures in a consistent and standardised way. **(See Table 1 of Grants)**

5. Strengthening infection prevention and control (IPC) is a central pillar of broader health systems strengthening to support patient safety and build patient safety capacity. Hospital-to-hospital partnerships have been shown to help build the necessary immediate capacity in frontline health workers through effective training, mentoring and joint problem solving. THET has worked closely with WHO African Partnerships for Patient Safety (APPS) since its inception in 2009 in the development and support of hospital-to-hospital partnerships to improve patient safety.

6. While health partnerships are not designed to form part of an aid response, they are also proving valuable in humanitarian situations as they already have an established network of relationships and 'a presence on the ground'. For example King's Health Partners, present in Sierra Leone at the time of the outbreak under a HPS grant, remained in-country and worked closely with the Government of Sierra Leone and the British response to provide technical clinical advice where required. Some key successes included helping six hospitals across Freetown to set up Holding Units; these units were set up by the King's team working in partnership with hospital staff. They are now managed by Sierra Leoneans, with training, mentorship and supportive visits from King's. King's also provided training for a large number of healthcare workers, surveillance officers and others involved in the outbreak. Without the existing partnership, King's would have lacked the local contacts and knowledge required for such a rapid, well-targeted, effective intervention.

Table 1: HPS Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) grant overviews

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| <p>Plymouth University Peninsula Schools of Medicine and Dentistry</p> | <p>Masanga Hospital, Sierra Leone</p> | <p>This project will promote resilience to future VHF outbreaks in a rural West African Health District through infection prevention control training and community awareness. By the end of the project, 20 staff at Masanga Hospital and 200 health care workers at the nearby Primary Health Units will be trained in the correct protocols for putting on and taking off PPE, and on the common hazards encountered when caring for patients at risk of VHF. Over 500 community members linked to these units will also be educated about the risks of VHF. The training will be delivered through innovative educational technology — which have been developed and piloted during the 2014 Ebola outbreak. The content incorporates international IPC protocols, including WHO and UNICEF protocols, and is aligned to the national policies for PHU facilities in Sierra Leone</p> |
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| <p>University of Southampton</p> | <p>Lighthouse Christ Eye Centre, Mombasa, Kenya (Vision 2020)</p> | <p>Working in four Vision 2020 hospitals (the Lighthouse, the Coast General Hospital, Lion’s Cataract and Kwale Ophthalmology Unit). The project is to develop and disseminate 9 infection prevention and control (IPC) guidelines; for hand hygiene, disinfection and sterilisation, general IPC, aseptic practices, safe injection, sharps disposal, triaging, equipment sterilisation. After development, relevant training for the guidelines will be delivered to 200 nursing staff through teaching visits from UK teams of volunteers. Further development of processes will be discussed afterwards, and an ongoing revision process of the guidelines and training will continue.</p> |
| <p>University of Salford</p> | <p>Mountains of the Moon University, Uganda</p> | <p>This project will build on previous partnership working and interventions in the area of IPC to establish multi-agency teams to champion Patient Safety. The aim is to embed hand hygiene practices in 5 health facilities in the Kabarole District. The project will run workshops and training on the need for, definition of and importance of Patient Safety. The targeted cadres for the multi-agency groups includes Senior Policy Makers, Facility Managers, Health workers, Staff and students at MMU and Salford University (virtual placements). It is expected that as a minimum, 50 health workers and 50 MMU students will complete formal training on Hand hygiene to control infection. The project will also work with MMU’s Business Incubation Unit to test the market and develop production and distribution capacity for locally produced hand soap and hand rub, after the project this will run as an autonomous social enterprise.</p> |
| <p>Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Foundation Trust</p> | <p>Church of Uganda Kisiizi Hospital, Uganda</p> | <p>The focus of this project is on three action areas of Patient Safety Awareness (PSA), Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and Health-care Associated Infections (HCAI). The project will identify champions and leaders for all three areas, who will lead activity. PSA – the needs of the community will be assessed and then patient engagement tools and activities will be introduced. HCAI – a programme of audit and surveillance for Kisiizi to implement will be developed. Alongside this a rolling programme of formal IPC education will be developed with a related IPC induction programme for new staff. PPE – this will also be included in the staff training developed and be monitored through the audit programme. Overall the project aims to train 10 IPC champions, 200 health workers, and reach 1000 people through the community patient safety awareness programme.</p> |

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| <p>James Cook University Hospital, Middlesbrough</p> | <p>Kamuzu Central Hospital, Malawi</p> | <p>This project will provide in-house training in IPC activities to create a cohort of IPC staff at KCH. The project will build their capacity to carry out surveillance, identify the appropriate treatment for patients and deliver future in-house training. Training will initially be delivered by a team of UK NHS volunteers. Nursing staff will be trained in essential IPC procedures; to include the surveillance of suspected cases of infection and their documentation on specific data sheets, how to carry out site specific specimen collection, transportation, handling and storage. Dedicated IPC nurses will also receive leadership training, to enable them to act as champions and lead efforts to create sustainable change. Laboratory staff will also be trained in techniques to enable determination of antibiotic sensitivity of isolated pathogens, which will enable more appropriate treatment of cases of infection.</p> |
| <p>Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust</p> | <p>Kambia District Health Management Team, Sierra Leone</p> | <p>The project will deliver and IPC train-the-trainers course to 44 senior health staff from the maternity unit at Kambia hospital and surrounding Primary Health Units (PHUs). The training will be delivered through several 5-day visits from a UK volunteer training team. The team of trained trainers will then be supported to deliver this training to health workers in Kambia hospital and the PHUs.</p> |
| <p>University of Sheffield</p> | <p>Bayero University Kano & Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital, Nigeria</p> | <p>The focus of the project is Patients Safety Awareness (PSA) and improving Health-associated Infections surveillance. It will seek to assign dedicated IPC nurses and doctors, review and strengthen the IPC committee structure in both hospitals and also hold a 5-day workshop with senior hospital staff to develop relevant IPC protocols based on WHO guidelines. In terms of PSA, they will also run video campaign sessions with the staff, using WHO resources and distribute relevant posters. NHS volunteers from the UK will visit the hospitals in Nigeria to act as critical friends and support the implementation of protocols and advise on training</p> |
| <p>Public Health England</p> | <p>Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Chest Diseases (RGICD), India</p> | <p>This project will train two groups of healthcare workers, from RGICD and JIPMER respectively. The two distinct groups of healthcare workers will be trained in infection prevention and control (IPC) procedures on the following four action areas; patient safety awareness (PSA), healthcare associated infections (HCAI), healthcare worker protection (HWP) and healthcare waste management (HWM). The healthcare workers trained will be front-line staff such as medical, nursing and ambulance staff and laboratory staff. Across the two institutions a total of 48 healthcare workers will be trained. On each of the four courses, at least 6 trainees will belong to the host institute (RGICD or JIPMER) with the remaining 6 chosen from local institutes in different parts of each region to ensure resilience in the event of an outbreak.</p> |