

Government cuts £48million in funding for global health training as part of UK Aid spending cuts

The UK Government has cut £48million in global healthcare funding as part of the wider cuts to UK foreign aid spending, according to the Tropical Health and Education Trust (THET).

One of the programmes affected by this decision is the **UK Partnerships for Health Systems (UKPHS)** programme set up by THET and the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM). UKPHS would have enabled NHS staff from across the UK to provide critical training to 78,000 healthcare professionals in low and lower-middle income countries, including care for children with cancer and improving maternal and neonatal care.

Due to be implemented across 2020-2024, the funding for the five-year programme was approved by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (then DFID) in December 2019 but later cancelled on 23rd April 2021, despite current reductions in the UK Aid budget being posited as a temporary measure.

The programme had been developed in partnership with ministries of health in the target countries, including Nepal, Myanmar, Uganda, Zambia, Ethiopia, Somaliland/Somalia, Bangladesh, Tanzania, Ghana and Sierra Leone, and would have benefitted more than 430,000 patients around the world while providing invaluable learning for NHS staff to be applied in the care of patients in the UK. The charity estimates that over 500 health facilities across these nations will no longer receive any support through the programme.

The cuts come as the world continues to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic, with healthcare representing a global priority. Hundreds of NHS staff had already signed up to the programme and £1.2m of British taxpayers' money has already been spent which cannot be recouped.

Dr Rowan Burnstein, a Consultant in Anaesthesia and Intensive Care at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge is one of many who signed up to the scheme. Dr Burnstein commented:

As a critical care consultant in the NHS I am devastated to see the cuts the UK Government is making to global health. During the past 7 years my Cambridge medical, nursing, and physiotherapy colleagues have worked with Myanmar colleagues to improve Myanmar trauma care, pathology services, medical education and intensive care. In the past year we have also supported the Covid response in Myanmar and continue to support medical colleagues as we can now. Aside from the impact of our work in Myanmar, we personally, and the NHS more widely have gained so much strength, wisdom and knowledge from our interaction with Burmese colleagues, much of which is translated into the workplace locally. I have seen similar gains made from partnerships that have developed across the world as a result of Health Partnership schemes. The loss of the UKPHS to the development of NHS staff and services in the years to come will be significant. It is one of the most effective means for bilateral development of healthcare professionals that has developed over recent years. The NHS is stronger for its global ties as a result of this scheme. I know I speak for many when I say we are angry and deeply saddened by these decisions.

Ben Simms, Chief Executive Office of THET, commented:

“When the Government announced this scheme more than 12 months ago, hundreds of NHS staff volunteered to support their call to assist colleagues overseas facing rising tides of COVID-19. They did so with urgency, building on long-standing partnerships between NHS institutions and their counterparts in Africa and Asia, many nurtured by UK Aid for over a decade. Their response was a recognition of the global nature of this pandemic and of the necessity for the NHS to take lessons from other nations about pandemic preparedness and response. The abrupt cancellation is a punch in the gut for staff who have spent weeks in preparation, and the hundreds of thousands of patients who were set to benefit from the sharing of UK expertise.”

Lord Nigel Crisp, Chair of the APPG-Global Health and THET Patron, commented:

“Cancelling this programme damages health care in some of the poorest countries in the world and does severe harm to the UK's reputation. The doctors, nurses and others who volunteer are excellent ambassadors for Global Britain providing vital support to these countries, embodying British expertise and values, and bringing back learning to the NHS. Their work is particularly important at the moment in helping countries with very few resources of their own to tackle pandemic.”

ENDS

Notes to Editor

1. For further information or interviews please contact: summer.simpson@thet.org.
2. About THET: THET is a global health organisation with a vision of a world where everyone has access to healthcare. For over 30 years we have been working to achieve this by training and educating health workers in Africa and Asia in partnership with organisations and volunteers from across the UK. Founded in 1988 by Professor Sir Eldryd Parry, we are the only UK charity with this focus. From reducing maternal deaths in Uganda to improving the quality of hospital care for injured children in Myanmar, we work to strengthen local health systems and build a healthier future for all. In the past ten years alone, THET has reached over 100,000 health workers across 31 countries in Africa and Asia in partnership with over 130 UK institutions.
3. £48million is the total sum of funding lost for global health training programmes delivered through Health Partnerships. This includes: the £28.5million UK Partnerships for Health Systems programme (UKPHS) which had the possibility of being extended by £13m until 2025; the £7million UK Health Partnership Fund (UKHPS) in Myanmar.
4. More detail about the programmes: The 2020-2024 UK Partnerships for Health Systems programme is a £28.5m funding programme to support Health Partnerships between UK institutions and their counterparts overseas. The programme aims to help LMICs build stronger and more resilient health systems and make progress towards universal health coverage through improved health service performance for poor and vulnerable populations. It is being implemented by the Tropical Health and Education Trust (THET) with technical expertise from the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM). The contract, signed in December 2019, includes the option to extend the programme by a further two years for up to £13m, to 2025/6.