

INTERNATIONAL HEALTHCARE

VOLUNTEERING FOR INDIVIDUALS AND HEALTHCARE ORGANISATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Some organisations and individuals in the NHS already offer their support to health systems in developing countries.

Through this work we can play our part in improving health globally while developing leadership and other skills in the NHS and further building and sustaining international networks. This is not just for clinical professionals but also can include non-clinical staff (IT, HR and Medical Records staff) and healthcare managers.

BACKGROUND

The UK government recognises the importance of addressing global health issues and its commitment to do so was first set out in the 'Health is Global: a UK Government Strategy 2008-13'. This highlights the NHS as a key partner in improving health globally, and encourages the NHS to learn from what is going on in other parts of the world.

Sir David Nicholson, NHS Chief Executive, in 2010 said that *"Clinicians and managers can gain a great deal from opportunities to work and train overseas – it can be professionally and personally rewarding. The NHS can learn from good practice and new ways of working that we can benefit from."*

NHS Involvement in International Development

The framework for **'NHS Involvement in International Development'** was created in 2010 to provide greater clarity on how NHS agencies and individuals can best maximise their potential to contribute, in a sustainable and appropriate way, to capacity-building in developing countries.

Health Partnership Scheme

The Tropical Health Education Trust (THET) manages the Health Partnership Scheme funded by the UK government's Department for International Development (DfID). This scheme harnesses the expertise of UK health professionals to improve health outcomes by transferring skills and supporting skills development in low income countries. As well as through promoting UK involvement in volunteering.

Andrew Mitchell the Secretary of State for International Development said that: *"Britain's doctors, nurses and midwives are some of the best in the world and by sharing their skills they can contribute to improving the health of people in some of the world's poorest countries."*

HOW IT WORKS

Here are some real-life stories from healthcare volunteers:

- [A student placement in Democratic Republic of Congo](#) - by Cikwanine Gisele Rwegema (taken from the RCN website)
- [Six months in 'magnificent' Manguzi \(PDF 45 KB\)](#) - by Emily Hufton (Taken from the RCN website)
- [Training Theatre Nurses in Africa \(PDF 181 KB\)](#) - by Judy Mewburn (taken from the RCN website)

- Helping Children with Cancer in Ghana can be found at <http://www.thet.org/resources-for-health-partnerships>

Peter Smith, lead nurse for critical care outreach found that international experience *"gave me a new set of challenges that I had to learn to deal with. I often found myself outside my normal comfort box but the experience gave me a fresh outlook and I came back to the UK fully charged and with a real appreciation about what we have in the NHS. It made it easier for me to work with staff and get the most out of them. I am more adaptable and can cope much easier with change."*

Reference: How International Healthcare links can help NHS Workforce development by Brenda Longstaff from Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, in HSJ 24th May 2012.





BENEFITS

Clinicians, managers and support staff can gain a great deal by taking up opportunities to work and train overseas. It can be professionally and personally rewarding. The NHS can also learn good practice and new ways of working

Benefits to the **individual healthcare** worker may be to their hard or soft skills.

Hard skills:

- Clinical skills
- Managerial skills
- Educational skills
- Leadership skills
- Languages

Soft skills:

- Flexibility
- Independence
- Adaptability
- Problem solving
- Confidence
- Diplomacy
- Patience
- Personal insight

These benefits can be used as evidence of the individuals CPD using the Knowledge and Skills Framework (see information on Useful Tools at the end) or the Leadership Qualities Framework.

The **healthcare organisations** can also reap multiple benefits:

- Better return on investment in training – staff return with a wide range of skills and a better ability to work in challenging environments and in teams for a minimal cost to the organisation.
- Enhanced leadership and professional skills
- Enhanced reputation of the organisation among the public, staff and media.
- Staff engagement and motivation which leads to greater staff satisfaction and improves retention and productivity.
- Greater understanding and sensitivity to the needs of individual patients and this can lead to an improved patient experience.
- Greater organisational cohesion, innovation and corporate social responsibility which can embed key NHS values and potentially lead to higher sustainable organisational performance and cultural competence.

- Higher levels of cultural competence that can lead to the development of culturally appropriate services for NHS patients.
- Refreshed staff
- Education and research opportunities which can benefit patients in both communities.
- Greater understanding of social and ethnic diversity.
- Greater use of technologies e.g. telemedicine.
- Greater understanding of global health issues.

Benefits to **overseas healthcare** systems:

- Recruitment, retention, education and training for health workers, managers and administrators.
- Strengthening public health, health systems and institutions – covering all aspects of health from public health to health services, including their operational management and delivery.
- Making knowledge, research evidence and best practice accessible to health workers, policy makers and the public alike.

USEFUL LINKS

THET website – www.thet.org

THET Health Partnership Scheme (HPS) - <http://www.thet.org/hps/> Health Bay is where individuals or institutions can access a database of institutions in the UK and abroad who are interested in forming, volunteering or advising on Health Partnerships.

<http://www.thet.org/health-partnership-scheme/healthbay>

Building a Caring Future developed by Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trusts - To help you to collect evidence of knowledge and skills gained from international links work:

<http://www.thet.org/publications/building-a-caring-future>

World Health Organisation (WHO) - <http://www.who.int/en/>

VSO- <http://www.vso.org.uk/>

Merlin- <http://www.merlin.org.uk/>

Medecins Sans Frontiere- <http://www.msf.org.uk/>

OT Frontiers for Occupational Therapists. <http://www.otfrontiers.co.uk/>

ADAPT for Physiotherapists. <http://adapt.csp.org.uk/about-us>

CTI for Speech and Language Therapy - <http://www.ctint.co.uk/>

RCN- Humanitarian Community - <http://www.rcn.org.uk/development/communities/specialisms/international-humanitarian>

Or RCN Policy and International Department - <http://www.rcn.org.uk/nursing/internationalwork>

RCM- <http://www.rcm.org.uk/college/policy-practice/international/>

MAITS (Multi Agency Training and Support)- <http://www.maits.org.uk/>

REFERENCES

Health is Global: a UK Government Strategy 2008-13 (HMG 2008)

The Framework for NHS Involvement in International Development Department of Health, 2010



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