

Time to 'go global' with GP education

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Introduction

Globalisation is having a significant impact on health and all doctors increasingly need an awareness and understanding of key global health issues (1). Currently, GPs receive little formal training in this area and a commission on Medical Education for the 21st century noted a mismatch between doctors' knowledge and the professional competencies required to work in our increasingly interdependent world (2). In view of this, we ran a Global Health conference for all doctors on the Dorset GP Vocational Training Scheme. This included education relevant to the United Nations Sustainable Developmental Goals: 'Ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing for all at all ages'. Our aim is to train GPs that are committed to equality and contributing to a global health care system where "no one is left behind" (3).

Our Global Health training included a keynote lecture outlining current global health challenges from a primary care perspective, followed by trainees' choice of five (from ten) workshops (see below for outline and objectives). GP trainees were also required to engage in self directed study by preparing a poster on a global health issue. These were displayed for discussion and peer led learning.

1. Fever in the returning traveller

International travel has become more commonplace. A number of people travelling overseas develop a fever either during or shortly after their return to UK. The differential diagnosis for their fever is broad and can be due to infections found in the country they visited, infections unrelated to their travel or non-infectious causes. This session covered some of the common causes for fever in the returning traveller and the approach to the management of these patients.

2. HIV/AIDS in developing countries

HIV continues to be a major global health issue. WHO estimate there are approximately 36.7 million people living with HIV, with 1.8 million people newly affected in 2016. In the developing world communicable diseases have a significantly higher impact on society than they would in a more developed country, due to rapid spread and the slow response to not only treat but prevent further infection. This workshop explored how early recognition and diagnosis can limit the impact of HIV on individuals, communities and nations, as well as the importance of healthcare infrastructure.

3. Does superbug resistance pose a genuine threat to global health?

This session looked at the effect of antibiotic resistance on global health. Although this occurs naturally, it is compounded by the increasing use/ misuse of antibiotics in humans and animals. This affects global health, food security and development. We discussed how this affects clinical care of patients returning from abroad and the broader health issues that arise.

4. Primary care saves lives - healthcare systems around the world

Evidence of the health-promoting influence of primary care has been steadily accumulating for years. This evidence shows that primary care helps prevent illness and death, The evidence also shows that primary care (in contrast to specialty care) is associated with a more equitable distribution of health in populations, a finding that holds in both cross-national and within-national studies. The means by which primary care improves health was explored, along with ways to improve overall health and reduce differences in health across major population subgroups.

5. How can technology transform global health?

This workshop provided an overview of how technology relates to health on an international scale. The UN estimates that over 6 billion people have access to a mobile phone. Fewer have access to hospitals or clean water. Led by speakers from The Virtual Doctors who provided examples of how technology has already contributed to global health, as well as discussing its untapped potential.

6. Public Health Response to the Humanitarian Crisis of Ebola

Humanitarian crises are often managed using a multi-agency approach. This session was presented by Dr Nathalie MacDermott who has first-hand experience of working with local populations, containment of the Ebola crisis, working collaboratively between different organisations and overcoming local challenges.

Selected references

(1). Walpole et al (2016). Time to go global: A consultation on global health competencies for postgraduate doctors. *International Health*, 8(5): 317-323.

(2) Frenk, J., Chen, L., Bhutta, Z et al. (2010). Health professionals for a new century: Transforming education to strengthen health systems in an interdependent world. *Lancet*, 376: 1923-1958.

(3) <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda>

7. Practical Help Achieving Self Empowerment (PHASE) - The need for Primary Care

Nepal is one the poorest countries in the world with a population of 29 million living mainly in remote, rural areas, and access to healthcare can be limited. Governmental and non-governmental organisations are working together to try and make improvements, but the terrain and lack of infrastructure in parts of the country, along with poverty, make this a real challenge. A UK GP shared his experiences of working with PHASE in rural outposts. He discussed the common illnesses seen and clinical protocols used by staff, the importance of health promotion with immunisations and family planning, and the management of more chronic conditions. He also discussed some of the practical and ethical issues encountered.

8. Poole Africa link

Almost 6 million children under 5 died in 2015 and more than half of these could have been prevented with access to simple, affordable interventions (WHO). Since 2009 Poole Hospital NHS Foundation Trust has been working in Sudan and Uganda to help train local clinicians to improve midwifery, standards of care in anaesthesia and obstetric surgery, neonatal and child health. The speaker discussed her forthcoming trip to Uganda along with the political, practical and safety challenges of working in a developing country.

9. Perinatal mental health in Nepal

WHO estimate that in developing countries, 16% of mothers experience mental health problems during pregnancy and 20% after child birth. These health problems not only impact on the mothers, but can also have significant effects on the growth and development of their children. Effective interventions can be delivered even by well-trained non-specialist health providers. This workshop provided an overview of the perinatal mental health of women in Nepal, and the challenges and successes of a Bournemouth University project to improve perinatal mental health.

10. Opportunities for GP trainees

This session was an introduction to the Thames Valley and Wessex 'Improving Global Health through Leadership Programme', which offers NHS staff the opportunity to work for 6 months with an overseas partner in a resource-poor setting. The programme enables volunteers to develop leadership skills through project work using system-strengthening methods. There was also a speaker from WONCA, an organisation established to improve the quality of life of people globally and to foster high standards of care in general practice.

GP trainees perspectives on global health training

GP Trainees rated the training as highly relevant and useful. They were keen for further regular updates and the ability to link with specific projects. Comments included:

"I just wanted to thank you for putting on such a fantastic Global Health education day. It was brilliant to gain insights into such a variety of Global Health issues and evoked much important and inspiring discussion amongst us all"

"Interesting, inspiring and thought provoking day"

"I think it's great to have a global perspective, particularly when considering that, despite the pressures that face us in general practise now and in the future, the UK leads in providing world class healthcare"

Conclusions

Global health education needs to be systematically incorporated into all postgraduate medical curricula. GP trainees clearly understood the value of developing their competencies in Global Health and wanted further training. In response to this, we have revised our GP teaching programme to include a regular module on Global Health. Local qualified GPs were also interested in our event and, subsequently, we have established a Dorset Global Health Network to run regular education and networking events for anyone interested in Global Health, in collaboration with Wessex Global Health Network and Bournemouth University. For more information, please email eforde@bournemouth.ac.uk