

THET and Health Links work in... UGANDA

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About Uganda

Uganda, in East Africa, has a population of 28.9 million, 80% of whom rely on agriculture (mainly coffee and tea) as the basis of their livelihoods. Since becoming independent from Britain in 1962 Uganda suffered greatly in the '70s and '80s during the military dictatorship of Idi Amin followed by



the return to power of Milton Obote. However, more recently Uganda has become relatively peaceful, stable and prosperous, experiencing significant economic growth over the last decade. Of particular benefit has been the truce signed by the Lord's Resistance Army and the government in 2006. Nevertheless Uganda remains one of the world's poorest countries with 31% of the population below the poverty line and a life expectancy of 50.

The health context in Uganda

Uganda has a life expectancy of 49 years for men and 51 for women. 134 children in every 1,000 die before they reach the age of 5 (WHO). Within Africa, Uganda has been a leader in the fight against HIV and AIDS with prevalence dropping from 18% to 6% in the past decade (DFID).

The primary focus of THET and Links work in Uganda is mental health; an important but often neglected issue here, as elsewhere in Africa. Community studies have often found between 20% and 30% of people suffer from mental health problems, as populations recover from 20 years of armed conflict. As such, mental health has been identified among the most pressing health needs in the country and specific goals on mental health are set within the National Minimum Health Care Package.

The Mental Health services in Uganda faces challenges of inadequate staffing and insufficient supply and funding of mental health medicines. In the Health Sector Strategic Plan II, being implemented from 2005/06 to 2009/10, the government sets out to improve the situation through specific mental health targets:

- All Regional Referral Hospitals have functional Mental Health Units
- 50% increase in community access to mental health services
- Development of a community strategy for prevention of mental illness

Background on THET in Uganda

THET's work in Uganda started in 1997 when a link was formed between the Faculty of Health and Social Care at the University of Hull and the Department of Nursing at Mbarara University of Science and Technology. Links are long-term institutional partnerships between NHS Trusts, academic and research institutions in the UK and their counterparts overseas. THET facilitates the development of Links through advice, networking and occasional funding.

In this we work closely with the Ugandan Ministry of Health to ensure our work contributes to the national health strategy and the development of health systems in Uganda. THET and the Government of Uganda have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to ensure Links are (i) harmonised with the Ugandan national strategy for healthcare development and (ii) able to achieve their potential and provided with a framework in which to work.

THET has also supported a programme for Continuing Medical Education (CME) and Professional Development from 2000 to 2007, following a request from the Uganda Ministry of Health. Main impacts from this have included the establishment of a management structure for CME and the development of a CME newsletter, this programme is seen as a model by a number of other African countries.

Links between the UK and Uganda

There are now over 15 Links between Ugandan and UK institutions, some examples of which are given below. To view the full list, please go to www.thet.org.uk and select Uganda in the Links Search section.

Butabika – East London NHS Foundation Trust (established 2004)

This Link, which has won a special commendation at the London Health and Social Care Awards, is one of the first and most active with a focus on mental health. Butabika Hospital has identified areas in which it hopes to develop its services and train its staff. These are being addressed in distinct 'streams' of work supported by experts in East London. Areas of work include drug and alcohol, child and adolescent psychiatry, community-based work, psycho-trauma, Psychiatric Clinical Officer development, and forensic and inpatient service development.

Kisiizi – Chester (established 2007)

The recently established Link between Kisiizi Hospital and the Countess of Chester Hospital is focusing initially on ultrasound, nurse education and corporate management expertise. A scoping visit to Kisiizi in August 2008 developed clear plans which will be used to guide work and provide a baseline against which future progress can be assessed.

Mbarara – Bristol (established 1999)

The Faculty of Medicine at Mbarara University has collaborated with the University of Bristol since 1999, mainly in training postgraduate students. In 2006 a further link was formed between Mbarara and the United Hospitals Bristol NHS Foundation Trust, following which Mbarara developed links with various departments, including Ophthalmology and Gynaecology. Through these Bristol supports staff training in Mbarara Hospital by visits, mentorship, educational supervision, and training placements. The Link also fundraises and provides critical equipment. The teaching visits have helped Mbarara produce several highly qualified postgraduates who are now involved in running the hospital.

Atatur – Sheffield / Pearl of Africa Foundation (established 2006)

This Link supports improvements in the health of people served by Atatur Hospital, by supporting the development of the hospital's healthcare facilities. The Pearl of Africa Foundation and colleagues in the UK established the Atatur Hospital Support Network in 2007 and the Link has since been raising awareness of, and funds and support for the network. A focus in 2008 has been the delivery of training based on priorities identified by Atatur staff during a clinical needs assessment visit. Network members are also working on the provision of support systems, communications, electricity supplies, water and sanitation, and clinical waste disposal solutions.

Mbale – PONT (Partnership Overseas Networking Trust) (established 2004)

PONT was founded in Pontypridd to provide a framework for Links to evolve and grow. Their objective is to build a sustainable integrated network of trained Primary Healthcare Volunteers through Government – NGO collaboration to improve access to health care in Mbale. Teams from Pont have visited Mbale annually; supported and facilitated the training of over 100 Community Health Practitioners, 60 Health Workers and 30 Trainers of Trainers; and supported systems development with a Primary Health Committee. They have also reduced malaria rates through health education and the introduction of insecticide treated nets. In August 2008, the Link was commended for Community linking through the Wales for Africa initiative, and received UN Gold Star Awards for work in Health and with Children.

The impact of our work

Some of the many impacts of THET and Links work in Uganda have been:

- Through the mental health programme run by the Psychiatry Department at Mbarara Hospital, a model for delivering community mental health has been developed, scaled up and replicated in other parts of Uganda.
- The establishment of a Psychiatric Clinical Officers Association has been supported, to strengthen the profession and enable sharing of best practice.
- The successes of Uganda programmes have been disseminated through the sharing of best practice with mental health programmes in Malawi.
- The Link between the University Hospitals Bristol NHS Foundation Trust and Mbarara University of Science and Technology is continuing to support the development of postgraduate medical education in Mbarara by sending six to eight consultant teachers every year and supporting a full-time professor of medicine. The Link is also broadening its work to other fields.
- Through the Targeting Children with Epilepsy Project an estimated 4,000 children with epilepsy are receiving treatment and will benefit from reduced stigma.

With thanks to...

All those who have made our work possible in the past and present, including:

- Comic Relief
- The Sir Halley Stewart Trust
- The Health Foundation
- The Nuffield Foundation
- The Commonwealth Fellowship Commission

Useful websites

Ministry of Health website: www.health.go.ug

WHO country profile: www.who.int/countries/uga/en

FCO country profile: www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-the-fco/country-profiles/sub-saharan-africa/uganda

Atatur Hospital Support Network: www.ahsn.org.uk

Working directly with partners in Uganda

As well as working with Links, in some cases THET works directly with partners in Uganda, for example:

Targeting children with epilepsy in five districts in Uganda (2006 – 2009)

The prevalence of epilepsy in children is extremely high in Uganda, yet stigma surrounding the condition and lack of services means children from the poorest families have a very low quality of life.

This project works with one Psychiatric Clinical Officer (PCO) in each of five district hospitals, enabling them to expand community services by training health workers, teachers, traditional healers and community leaders to reduce stigma and to increase knowledge about treatment for the condition. The project also incorporates a component of income generation for families of epileptic children and shares outcomes with PCOs throughout Uganda.

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