

OVERVIEW

THET has deep links with the NHS, including co-founding the NHS Volunteering Group, being a member of the NHS International Health Group and its pivotal role in managing Health Partnership programmes. Funded by ODA (Overseas Development Assistance), the framework of the Health Partnership Scheme (HPS) has facilitated the overseas volunteering of over 2000 NHS staff, and the training of over 100,000 health workers across 31 countries in Africa and Asia. With 191 partnerships and 210 projects formed and delivered over the past nine years through the HPS, the programmes have contributed to more effective and efficient health systems in low- and middle-income countries (LMICS). They have also had a beneficial impact on the NHS. UK staff report returning home with increased knowledge, improved leadership skills and a greater understanding of innovation within healthcare.

Within the past year, the global health sector has witnessed the exacerbation of existing inequalities due to COVID-19. This is accompanied by the persisting fragmentation of universal health systems and cuts to UK Aid funding. As the world prepares to be ushered into a post-pandemic era, vaccine inequity presents a possibility where LMICs are, once again, left behind. THET strongly believes that global solidarity in health is needed now more than ever.

THET has launched a focused campaign that seeks to mobilise NHS voices across the UK and increase support for ODA investments in global health among targeted members of Parliament. The campaign is called [HEAL \(Health Equity for ALL\)](#) and is drawing on THET's 30 years of experience in communicating the mutual benefits of ODA investments for the UK's NHS and the health systems of LMICs. THET is, therefore, well-positioned to lead on this angle whilst collaborating with sector-wide campaigns led by Action for Global Health (AFGH), of which THET is a member.

In the inception phase of the HEAL campaign, research carried out by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) in March 2019 through the Global Health Initiative prompted THET to conduct its own research with Ipsos MORI in November 2020. Through this, we hoped to better understand how the attitudes and perceptions captured in the aforementioned research compared to those amongst NHS health workers, who are THET's primary audience. The survey respondents comprised 400 health workers who either currently practise -- or previously practised -- in the NHS. Respondents included a variety of cadres: 50% General Practitioners, 25% nurses, and 25% specialists. The majority of respondents (78%) had practised in the NHS for 11 years or more. The survey had balanced representation across age and gender, although data is slightly skewed towards older professionals (71% of respondents were 40 or above) and men (56%). The majority of respondents (61%) were of a white or mixed white ethnic background, with those of Asian backgrounds being the second largest group, representing 27% of respondents. In terms of location, respondents were spread across the UK, with 7% in Scotland, 4% in Wales, 1% in Northern Ireland and 75% in England. The remainder chose 'other' or preferred not to say.

After analysing the polling data, we conducted one-to-one follow-up interviews to test messaging and identify the best channels for engagement. This polling and research have allowed us to establish key baseline data which will be monitored and evaluated throughout the campaign.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HIGH LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

The data established that NHS staff are interested in global health affairs and campaigns and are willing to get involved in some way. For 62% of respondents (246 out of 400) who had actively participated in global health activities, their engagement ranged from academic, research or training activities (37%) to volunteering in an emergency response (13%). The reasons for involvement for many were personal and professional development, but motivations were also rooted in altruism and solidarity (e.g., 41% of respondents wanted to offer their expertise to others, 30% wanted to support overseas colleagues).

Respondents who had not previously participated in global health activities cited a variety of potential benefits that could be derived from participation in global health activities, with only 1% stating they saw no potential benefit. The most highly cited potential benefits were those with altruistic or solidarity components, with 77% of respondents citing 'doing something worthwhile or charitable', 68% citing 'helping those in need', and 57% stating 'supporting colleagues overseas'. Personal development was also a strongly felt benefit of these activities, with 73% of respondents selecting it. 62% of respondents also saw professional development benefits, and 54% listed 'skill sharing'.

The results reflect the reality of NHS engagement in global health work in response to the growing international demand for joint knowledge and learning in healthcare. Not only is this evidenced by the 191 Health Partnerships formed with institutions in LMICs, but also by the involvement of the workforce in Health Education England (HEE) projects and programmes such as the Global Learners Programme, the International Postgraduate Medical Training Scheme, and the Global Technical Collaboration Consultancy Services. In addition to that, clinicians continue to engage with informal volunteering and many UK health workers are active participants in charities and non-governmental organisations.

SPOKESPEOPLE

There seems to be an eagerness to learn and hear from other health workers overseas -- half of the respondents want to hear about global health from their fellow health workers. These responses also illustrated the breadth of networks and channels used by NHS professionals to find out about global health activities, particularly highlighting the role that informal networks play in the dissemination of global health information. This affirms THET's vision for the HEAL campaign to be led primarily by health workers and presents an opportunity to incorporate a diverse range of global health resources in the campaign activities.

55% of respondents wanted to hear about global health from Professional Associations (e.g., Royal Colleges) and 45% wanted to hear from Government Bodies: (e.g., Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and Department of Health and Social Care). Respectively, 22% and 39% of respondents wanted to hear about global health from NHS arms-length bodies (e.g., Health Education England and NHS Confederation) and NHS Trusts.

BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT

In line with the key aim of the HEAL campaign, we thought it vital to explore how respondents felt about their MP's engagement, or lack thereof, with global health. Responses to these questions highlighted the lack of knowledge that surveyed health workers had of their MPs' views on global health. A third of respondents either wanted to see their MP become more supportive of global health programmes and activities or wanted them to be more actively involved in global health issues. This sentiment is echoed on a more national level. In 2020, the Coalition for Global Prosperity ran an opinion-polling project which focused on voters in North England who supported Conservatives in the 2019 General Election but supported other parties in the 2017 election. The poll found that 86% of new Conservative voters felt it was important that the UK provides disaster relief and humanitarian assistance, while 95% thought that it was important for Britain to support LMICs in the prevention and containment of future pandemics such as COVID-19.

Another barrier to engagement that should be noted is the global pandemic and how it has influenced health workers' current opinions of UK government spending levels on UK Aid. A third of respondents stated COVID-19 made them think the UK government should spend *more* on UK Aid overseas, 27% stated the UK government is spending the *right* amount on UK Aid overseas, and 16% stated that the government should spend *less*. Almost a quarter of respondents were unsure and, interestingly, nurses had the most negative view on UK Aid spending overseas. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the shortages and extreme pressures they face in the NHS. In reality, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a major realignment of the UK Aid programme for 2020. Between March and September 2020, to meet the urgent health and humanitarian challenges facing LMICs, the UK government allocated nearly £800 million in new aid. At the same time, the impact of COVID-19 on the UK economy resulted in a sharp fall in projected gross national income (GNI), triggering a dramatic reduction in the aid budget, from 0.7% to 0.5% of GNI.

Finally, we asked health workers a set of questions to understand the barriers that NHS professionals perceive in their ability to engage in global health activities. 56% of respondents stated that greater support from NHS management would encourage their involvement. This was particularly important for those aged 25-39 with a correspondingly shorter length of experience working for the NHS. Some respondents also had worries around job retention, financial concerns, limited knowledge of opportunities to engage, and lack of opportunities. It is also important to note that women were more likely to highlight personal considerations such as family obligations, as obstacles to increasing their involvement in global health activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Only 5% of respondents stated that nothing would encourage them to get more involved in global health activities which strongly suggests that, with the right support and opportunities, global engagement across the NHS could be increased. It can be considered, therefore, that mobilisation of the NHS workforce is not only imperative to the HEAL campaign's success, but imperative to the success of the NHS itself. THET's [Health Innovation Platform](#) further exemplifies the vast potential that Health Partnerships bring; from the health harm reduction tools developed in Ghana being used as an NHS model, to Zambian and Kenyan surgical models being applied in training modules for Foundation Year 2 doctors in the UK. It is also important to note that skills and knowledge acquisition from LMICs will massively support the development of cultural competence within the NHS, particularly pertinent in an increasingly diverse society.

Based on our respondents' answers, engagement would be improved if work, family (particularly for women) and opportunities permitted. There is a need to work directly with NHS managers to continue to advocate the value of the Health Partnership model within the NHS workplace, while also facilitating their staff's involvement. Our research establishes that most respondents are accessing information on global health through informal channels, such as talking to colleagues and using social media. This presents an opportunity for NHS Trusts to maximise engagement through activities such as: including sections on global health developments and opportunities in newsletters and organising internal events to highlight staff's involvements.

As mentioned earlier, respondents also want to hear from professional associations, governmental and NHS arms-length bodies, which provides opportunities for the NHS to collaborate with external stakeholders to widen the reach and engagement of health workers. In response to 38% of respondents stating that they are interested in accessing an online forum about global health, THET launched a community platform called [Pulse](#). Alongside facilitating discussion and networking between people across the international non-governmental organisation (INGO) sector, Pulse is also designed to be a hub for global health resources, news, and information on the latest events and opportunities. Additionally, THET will launch a Health Advocates Database, which will act as a speaker bureau and compendium of case studies and stories, ensuring an ongoing supply of spokespeople who can publicly address the many areas of global health activity. NHS Trusts can market Pulse and the Health Advocates Database to their staff, with the expectation that interaction with these platforms will increase engagement with global health news and opportunities.

In light of the cuts to [UK foreign aid spending](#), it is important to acknowledge the potential impact that these severe governmental decisions may have on the attitudes and behaviours of UK health workers. Our research showed that 43% of respondents agreed, or strongly agreed, that their MP's attitudes to global health were important to them. One must also consider the surveyed individuals who felt that the UK government should spend *less* money on UK Aid overseas (mentioned in the second section of this report). While this is a challenging time for the wider INGO sector, this can also be seen as an opportunity to educate, influence and ultimately mobilise NHS voices in favour of global health investment. The upcoming HEAL campaign will provide a means for NHS staff to do just that. To support this, NHS Trusts may wish to provide a platform for their staff to communicate the impact that these cuts have, using the various channels of internal and external communication highlighted in this report.

The NHS workforce has experienced immense pressure, particularly throughout the pandemic. Yet the data shows that a large proportion of NHS staff are very aware of the many benefits of global health engagement: from skill-sharing to increased personal and professional satisfaction. These recommendations address various issues that were captured in the survey so it is expected that NHS Trusts may differ in what they implement, and how. All these recommendations are underlined by THET's fervent commitment to Health Partnerships and health workers across the globe.