Improving health worldwide: INDIA

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Over the past decade, India has emerged as a global economic power, as well as the world’s most populous democracy. Yet alongside this impressive development, the country faces critical health challenges both old and new.

Millions of people, particularly in poorer states, are suffering from treatable infectious diseases and various forms of malnutrition. Child and maternal mortality are still high, and with increasing urbanisation and an ageing population, we have seen the emergence of a new epidemic of non-communicable diseases including cancers, diabetes, heart disease and mental illness.

The scale of the challenge is immense, but the solutions are in our hands, if we have the imagination and determination to implement them. Working together, government agencies, researchers, health workers, activists, entrepreneurs and philanthropists can develop and deliver effective public health programmes.

Our School has been working with partners in India for many decades, and we understand that solutions can only emerge from working together, locally and globally. There are numerous wonderful examples of innovative projects that are transforming lives, but rather than reinvent the wheel at every turn, it is vital that we evaluate, learn and apply these lessons more widely to build effective health systems that provide universal access to diagnosis, treatment and care for all.

This is why we are working with the Public Health Foundation of India and numerous other partners including government agencies, universities, industry, NGOs and community groups, inspired by a common vision to improve health for all.

We hope that by reading about some of these projects, you will be inspired to support our work and to join us.

Baron Peter Piot
Director and Professor of Global Health
London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

Building capacity for public health

Despite substantial economic progress in recent years, India still faces serious health challenges, and has long suffered from a lack of human resource capacity in the public health system.

Launched in 2006 by the Prime Minister of India, the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) is a public-private initiative that is building institutional capacity in training, research and policy development in public health. One of our core aims is to establish up to eight schools of Public Health across India, and we have already been successful in setting up the first four of these, with the support of governments, NGOs, universities and individual supporters.

This would not have been possible without the PHFI-UK Consortium, a partnership between PHFI and sixteen UK institutions including the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. Our partnership with the School is born of a common vision, and we have been able to foster strong, enduring and productive academic links, which have greatly improved the research and teaching skills of our PHFI faculty.

We look forward to continuing to develop this partnership to help build a nationwide network for public health.

Professor K. Srinath Reddy
Founding President, Public Health Foundation of India

Our developing partnerships with the Public Health Foundation of India

The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine is actively involved in supporting the development of the Public Health Foundation of India through a Wellcome Trust grant which offers funding to a large number of PHFI faculty members to undertake masters and doctoral studies in the UK, and to conduct research projects in collaboration with UK faculty.

The programme is co-ordinated by the London School on behalf of sixteen leading UK institutions, working with the new Schools of Public Health in Delhi, Gandhi Nagar, Bhubaneswar and Hyderabad. Areas of research and training range from maternal and child health to the treatment of infectious disease to health policy and financing.

School professors David Heymann and Simon Croft are now working with PHFI to set up a Centre of Excellence in Infectious Diseases in Delhi, in partnership with the Royal Veterinary College and the Health Protection Agency.
Improving health in India

Tackling serious diseases: a new partnership for research

The Bloomsbury Institute for Pathogen Research is a new joint venture of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and University College London (UCL), dedicated to understanding every aspect of pathogens, from their genetic makeup to how they spread among human populations in India, Africa, and other parts of the world.

The institute was established in 2011 to find new diagnostic tools, treatments and vaccines for the world’s “big three killers” (HIV, TB and malaria) as well as neglected but often deadly diseases, such as sleeping sickness, dengue fever and leishmaniasis, for which new treatments are urgently needed. It is also conducting research on hospital-acquired infections, a deadly and growing problem around the world.

The work of the institute has outgrown existing laboratory space. A dedicated facility is being planned that will bring together 200 researchers from both parent institutions under one roof.

We expect the institute to be a world leader in infectious disease and pathogen research at every level, from the molecule to clinical interventions to policy affecting entire nations. The work conducted there will ultimately save countless lives and lead to a healthier population around the globe.

Institute Joint Director
Simon Croll, BSc PGCE PhD, is Professor of Parasitology and head of the Faculty of Infectious and Tropical Diseases at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

He developed his expertise in antimicrobial chemotherapy while working with the Wellcome Research Laboratories, Beckenham, UK in the 1980s. Following his return to academia, Professor Croll focused his research on the identification and evaluation of novel drugs and formulations for the treatment of leishmaniasis, malaria, human African trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness) and American trypanosomiasis (Chagas disease). From 2004 to 2007 he was the first research and development director of the Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative in Geneva, Switzerland. His current research interests include drug-immune response interactions and pharmacokinetic/pharmacodynamic relationships.

Institute Joint director
Deenan Pillay, BSc,PhD, MBBS, is Professor of Virology at University College London, and Head of the Department of Infection.

He is also a Consultant Medical Virologist at University College Hospital. He is past Director of the UCL/UCL Biomedical Research Centre, and of the national Health Protection Agency HIV and Antiviral Reference Laboratory. His major research interests are in HIV transmission and biology, particularly the emergence of HIV drug resistance. He is Head of one of only 5 WHO Specialist Laboratories in HIV Drug Resistance and a leading adviser to the WHO HIV Treatment Optimisation Guidelines on drug resistance.

Polly Roy has unlocked the secrets of bluetongue (pictured), a virus which devastates sheep and cattle around the world. This includes India, where the southern states are particularly badly hit.

Her discoveries have also laid the foundation for new vaccines against serious human diseases, including influenza, human papilloma virus and SARS. She recently pioneered a technique which may one day lead to safe vaccines against viruses ranging from rotavirus to HIV.

In 2012, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh awarded the General President’s Gold Medal, one of India’s most prestigious academic prizes, to Professor Roy for her contributions to science.

Polly Roy
MSc PhD FMedSci

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Putting health on the map: project and partnership highlights

IDEAS for maternal and newborn health

Working with local partners Better Birth, Manthan, Sure-Fix, Kathmandu Research & Communications and PINT, Whitedovee MEDs (the WE MEDs) is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to improve the health and survival of mothers and babies in Uttar Pradesh, Ethiopia and Nigeria. IDEAS gives measurement, learning and evaluation to discover what works, why and how.

Project and partnership highlights

Putting health on the map: uses measurement, learning and evaluation in Uttar Pradesh, Ethiopia and Nigeria. IDEAS the health and survival of mothers and babies with Sangath and other partners in Goa, have found that lay health workers, with appropriate training and supervision, can effectively treat disorders, such as schizophrenia, autism and anxiety and depression in primary care settings.

They are now extending this model to other programmes, generating evidence to influence policy and practice.

Tackling chronic disease

Chronic disease programmes, generating evidence to reduce the burden of chronic diseases throughout the region (see page 8 for details of projects and partners)

School researchers are working with partners Karnataka Health Promotion Trust (KHPT) and the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences to monitor and evaluate the impact and cost effectiveness of the Karnataka AIDS Initiative, launched in 2004 by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. School researchers are also working closely with the National AIDS Research Institute (NARI) to find the most effective treatment for people with HIV in resource poor areas of India, part of this International Evidence for Action on HIV Treatment and Care Systems Collaboration.

Research to improve treatment of leprosy

Diana Lockwood has worked for over 20 years in partnership with Lepra India, the Bombay Leprosy project (1986-98) and the Indian Institute of Chemical Biology in Kolkata on the Leishmania project. The study is revealing genetic factors and alleviation of neuropathic pain.

Research to improve treatment of leprosy

School researchers led by Swaran Path, working with Sangath and other partners in Goa, have found that lay health workers, with appropriate training and supervision, can effectively treat anxiety and depression in primary care settings. They are now extending this model to other disorders, such as schizophrenia, autism and alcohol use disorders.

Task sharing for mental health

Training and supervision, can effectively treat disorders, such as schizophrenia, autism and anxiety and depression in primary care settings.

IDEAS is funding research to improve treatment of leprosy with Sangath and other partners in Goa, and there is now a focus for the School’s work in eye health across the region.

School researchers led by GVS Murthy, is now a focus for the School’s work in eye health across the region.

Towards a DNA vaccine for leishmaniasis

Leishmaniasis is caused by a parasite transmitted by sandflies, it is endemic to India, which accounts for around 80% of the world’s fatal cases. Simon Croft and colleagues at the School have been studying the Leishmania parasite for over 20 years. They are currently working with the Indian Council of Medical Research at the Rajendra Memorial Research Institute, Patna and the Indian Institute of Chemical Biology in Kolkata on the LeishDNAVAX project, funded by the European Community to develop an effective DNA vaccine.

Healthy and responsive health systems

School researchers are working with partners including the Institute of Medical Sciences, Lucknow and the all-India Institute of Medical Sciences, Rishikesh, to assess the impact of rural sanitation on diarrhoea and infection levels of parasitic roundworm and hookworm.

How sanitation reduces diarrhoea and parasitic infections

School researchers Lucy Gilson, and Sara Hanson are working with partners including the Indian Institute of Management, Kashipur, the Indian Institute of Management, Patna and the Indian Institute of Management, Visakhapatnam, to develop clean drinking systems, and evaluate the impact of rural sanitation on diarrhoea and infection levels of parasitic roundworm and hookworm.

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Non-communicable diseases: the emerging epidemic

Diseases such as cancers, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and mental illness are reaching epidemic levels worldwide, and have become a major cause of death across India.

In 2012, the School established the Centre for Global Non-Communicable Diseases as a multi-disciplinary collaborative network. In India, the centre builds on the work of Shah Ebrahim (pictured left), Suresh Verma and colleagues over many years with a range of partners, including the Public Health Foundation of India, Centre for Chronic Disease Control, and the South Asia Network for Chronic Disease. Supported by a Wellcome Trust Strategic award for research and capacity building, this has led to a new integrated system for the prevention and care of chronic diseases. The School is also active in health services research and the provision of universal access to care.

Migration, obesity and diabetes

What are the factors behind India’s growing obesity and diabetes epidemic? The Indian Migration Study compares the health of migrant urban factory workers with their siblings in rural areas, revealing how migrant workers are at risk, and revealing patterns of diabetes and other lifestyle-related diseases.

Our partners include the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, King George’s Medical College and Institute of Clinical Epidemiology, Lucknow, Government Medical College, Nagpur, Nizam Institute of Medical Sciences, Hyderabad, Dr BR Ambedkar Medical College, Bangalore, the Centre for Chronic Disease Control, New Delhi, and the Public Health Foundation of India.
Support our work in India

The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine’s work with numerous partners in India is only possible thanks to the generous support of funders who share our commitment to improving health in this fast-growing country. These include the Wellcome Trust, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the UK Department for International Development, and the US National Institutes of Health, all of which have been instrumental in launching urgent projects.

But these projects need additional funding to ensure research discoveries are put to practical use and fledgling programmes grow and become self-sustaining.

Gifts from individuals and institutions make all the difference in making sure good ideas become good policy and practice. We hope you will join us in ensuring a healthy future for India.

For more information about supporting our work, please contact:

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Group activities help young people build nurturing relationships

Sangath is a non-governmental non-profit organisation based in Goa, which focuses on child development, adolescent and youth health, and mental health. Co-founded by Vikram Patel, Professor of International Mental Health at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, Sangath is one of many partners the School works with across India.