“There is no health without global health. The recent pandemic has shown just how quickly disease can spread and how our NHS must be trained and prepared for any eventuality. Experience gained in disasters and outbreaks overseas by NHS staff fortifies our defenses and increases our resilience. A global Britain needs global experience.”

Professor Tony Redmond OBE, Founder and Chair UK-Med
“This argument may sound counter-intuitive at a time when the NHS is under such pressure but the truth is that the NHS benefits enormously from these programmes through education, learning, improvements in staff morale and leadership development as well as through sharing in innovations with partners abroad.”

Lord Crisp, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global Health
Introduction

This unique study was undertaken by UK-Med, an international emergency health charity which sends expert NHS clinicians rapidly to the frontline of disasters, disease outbreaks or humanitarian events across the globe. It sheds light on the significant benefits they bring back for their NHS practice and patients in the UK. The findings and recommendations of this study are therefore important for NHS employers, policy makers, UK-Med members and the general public.

Although there is a large body of evidence strongly demonstrating the benefits to be gained from NHS workers who volunteer on international health partnerships, this is the first study to look specifically at the experience and testimonials of NHS clinicians who have taken part in an international emergency medical response. With a register of more than 580 UK-based clinicians, the majority of whom work for and are supported by NHS hospital trusts during their humanitarian response, UK-Med is uniquely positioned to undertake this study.

Its findings show that between 83-98% of participants demonstrated improvements in seven domains which helped them to improve their wellbeing, resilience and ability to deliver quality improvements for patients. These results corroborate existing research on international health partnerships.

Respondents also highlighted a clear awareness of the crucial connection between global and UK health systems and the essential role of the knowledge and skills they gained in safeguarding our own health system, most recently in their response to COVID-19.

1. Summarised in Annex 1 of the full report.

The study calls on policy makers, the NHS and the general public to recognise the dual benefits that emergency medical responses bring both to disaster affected communities and to the NHS.

UK-Med will be organising a series of meetings with NHS hospital trusts to explore opportunities to facilitate the effective release of staff to support future responses.

UK-Med are proud partners of the UK Emergency Medical Team (UK EMT), the UK government's frontline response to an international emergency. Many UK-Med responses have been made possible by UK Aid from the British people, via the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office.

Signed:

David Wightwick
CEO, UK-Med

Prof Tony Redmond OBE
Founder & Chair UK-Med

Prof Michael Griffin
President, Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh
Global emergency medical responses

UK-Med as partners of the UK Emergency Medical Team (UK EMT)

UK-Med
Bangladesh
Cape Verde
China

Djibouti
Greece
Myanmar
Philippines
Rwanda
Sierra Leone
United Kingdom
Yemen

Armenia
Bangladesh
Botswana
Burkina Faso
Cambodia
Chad
Eswatini
Gaza
Ghana
Haiti
Lebanon
Lesotho
Mozambique
Myanmar
Namibia
Nepal
Samoa
South Africa
South Sudan
Zambia

GLOBAL HEALTH RESPONDERS | SEPTEMBER 2021
Report approach

The evidence for this study was collected between March–July 2021, through a focus group, case studies and a survey of all UK based clinical responders from UK-Med’s database of clinicians.

Respondents were asked to assess improvements in their practice against the following domains:

1. Improved leadership and management skills
2. Improved clinical skills
3. Increased policy awareness
4. Ability to provide better patient experiences
5. Improved personal resilience
6. Positive impact on job interest and satisfaction
7. Improved teamwork skills.

Respondents were also asked to comment on skills gained during responses that they used during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results were analysed, and a series of recommendations have been developed in this report in order to maximise the benefits to the NHS and patients in the UK and overseas.
Survey Results

Geographical distribution of where survey responders live and work across the UK.

Our findings show an overwhelming positive impact in all seven domains and in skills used during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- 98% of members experienced a positive impact on their clinical skills.
- 98% of members experienced an improved ability to provide a better patient experience.
- 95% of members experienced a positive impact on their leadership and management skills.
- 95% of members experienced an improvement in their teamwork skills.
- 94% of members experienced a positive impact on their personal resilience.
- 90% of members experienced a positive impact on their job interest and satisfaction.
- 83% of members experienced an increase in policy awareness.
- 88% of members said, during the COVID-19 outbreak, they used skills gained from response(s) with UK-Med.
Survey results continued

Respondents highlighted improvements in three key areas:

**Quality improvement**

Returning NHS clinicians have developed key skills linked to their ability to deliver quality health services. These include better leadership and management skills, team-work, a greater understanding of how to treat and respond to global diseases and the provision of a better patient experience.

**Wellbeing**

Returning NHS clinicians feel re-energised and have a renewed sense of appreciation for the NHS and their colleagues. When burnout and staff stress levels among NHS workers are at an all-time high, opportunities which actively contribute to high levels of job satisfaction and rejuvenation should be encouraged.

**Resilience**

Responding to disease outbreak, conflicts and disasters has helped to increase returning NHS clinicians’ levels of personal resilience to challenges they have faced in their NHS workplace.

**COVID-19**

88% of members reported that during the COVID-19 outbreak, they have used skills directly gained from their response(s) with UK-Med.

The most commonly cited areas were as follows:

- Better understanding of outbreaks and how to treat patients
- Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Communication
- Planning
- Confidence
- Thinking outside the box/ adaptability.

PHOTO: Samoa 2019: A Daniel
“I have a much greater appreciation of how important it is to take time to clearly explain things to patients and earn their trust as well as to include relevant family members to act as advocates for them.”

____________________
Physiotherapist, Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

“Using limited resources, adaptability, using clinical judgements to assess and treat, rather than relying on investigations (which were not always available nor reliable).”

____________________
Paediatrician, The Hillingdon NHS Foundation Trust

“My response has fundamentally changed me as a human being (for the better!) This is reflected in my ability to provide a better patient experience.”

____________________
Nurse, Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust

“Resilience and being used to uncertainty. I certainly learnt a lot about managing outbreak responses with Ebola and I think I put various skills into practice at work – doing PPE videos and training, helping with resources and generally being calm about everything.”

____________________
GP, Kendal

“I used my experience of disaster response with UK-Med (Nepal, Philippines) to assist in my role as Clinical Director of the Nightingale Northwest Hospital in Manchester.”

____________________
Emergency Medicine Specialist, Founder and Chair of UK-Med

“Having the experience of deploying to Sierra Leone gave me a refreshed view of my usual job. I felt so grateful for the NHS and services that we have available.”

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Infectious Diseases Nurse, University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust
“Being lifted up and dropped into a situation at short notice helps to convince you that perhaps the edges of your ability are further apart than you expected! There is not a day that passes that I do not recall some aspect of my response. I have been able to focus on the positives and believe that I am better able to cope with the challenges of both my work and private life as a result.”

Nurse, Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust
Conclusions and recommendations

The report shows the many benefits that clinicians returning from UK-Med international emergency responses bring back to the NHS. We are now making the following recommendations to maximise these benefits.

For NHS leaders

- To recognise the benefits returning clinicians bring back to their UK practice and to explore how these experiences can be formally recognised in staff appraisals or as part of continuing professional development.
- To actively advocate for the benefits of international experience for the NHS, encourage staff to seek out opportunities, and create a culture in which this is valued.
- To create space for clinicians returning from international deployments to share their learning and maximise its benefits to the NHS.
- To support the release of UK-Med members to take part in international emergency response.

For NHS clinicians

- To consider whether international experience might be a suitable way for them to develop their clinical capabilities and find out more about the opportunities available, for example, through membership of UK-Med’s Register or the Faculty of Remote and Rural Humanitarian Healthcare at the Royal College of Surgeons Edinburgh.

For UK-Med members

- To share this report with their employers and discuss how they can be made available more frequently and for longer periods.
- To proactively share their stories with their work-place colleagues, family and friends.

Policy Makers and leaders of Health Professions

- To recognise the benefits participation in international emergency medical responses has for strengthening health systems both in the host countries and the UK.
- To recognise the contribution of international humanitarian experience to specialist medical training.
- To recognise how global health issues interconnect and develop policies that enable more NHS clinicians to participate in global health responses.

If you’ve been inspired by our members and the work they do at home and overseas, you can visit our website to find out more or make a donation: www.uk-med.org
“Working with UK-Med has helped me to explore my resilience and has given me valuable insight and awareness of my stress triggers and what helps me relax. It has also really helped to acknowledge the pressures that we can be under and that we do need to self-care.”

GP Kendal
Member Voices: Rowena Williams

“It’s helped me be the best nurse I can be”

Rowena treated patients at an Ebola Treatment Centre in Kerrytown, Sierra Leone and trained critical care nurses in the management of COVID-19 patients at four hospitals in Lebanon. Her experiences have helped in the following ways:

Leadership: “My experiences and training gave me fresh confidence at work to realise what I was capable of – gaining the trust of the staff, being a role model, and setting a good example – really helped with my service improvement project back home.

COVID-19: “Before I went to Lebanon, I was involved in the PPE training in my unit because of the work I’d done with Ebola and infectious diseases. That was something I could offer at my work which I wouldn’t have been able to do if I hadn’t worked with UK-Med.”

Better informed career choices: “Working for UK-Med has made me want to work in places that give me the right skills and training to be the best nurse I can be, and I think that’s brought me more job satisfaction. It’s given me a different perspective on the work I’m doing and the questions I ask.

Personal and professional development: “It’s quite a humbling experience and you’re exposed to people who’ve had a completely different life from what I’ve been lucky enough to have. It just makes you realise the tools we’ve got in the NHS are so rich, even though the NHS is going through a hard time – the opportunities are there. With all the service improvement projects that are going on in the NHS.”

Name: Rowena Williams (left)
Job title: ICU Nurse
Years as a health professional: 9 years
NHS Trust/Hospital: Sheffield Teaching Hospital

PHOTO: Sierra Leone 2015 R Williams
Member Voices: Stephen Owens

“We live in a globalised world and our approach to medicine has to reflect that”

Stephen treated patients at an Ebola Treatment Centre in Kerrytown in Sierra Leone, helped following a Diphtheria outbreak in Cox’s Bazar refugee camp in Bangladesh and cared for children suffering the complications of measles in Samoa. His experiences have helped in the following ways:

Clinical skills: “I’d had one lecture on Ebola as a student at the Liverpool School 20 years ago. It’s very different from attending a lecture and looking at a few slides of people in hazmat suits. Professionally speaking I’ve seen infections that I’ve never seen or rarely seen before, which meant that I can teach about those infections with some authority.”

COVID-19 and quality improvements: “Explaining the epidemiology of COVID-19 to staff at the Paediatric unit helped teams to prepare for the realities of working in an outbreak and the knock-on effects, including the restricted access to scans, theatres and face-to-face appointments. I was involved in the publishing of early data around the negative impact of COVID-19 on child safeguarding referrals, enabling our Centre to take a lead role in discussions around parental access and isolation of children and advice around working in PPE for prolonged periods of time.”

Preparing the NHS for global threats: “Someone walking into ED today could have been anywhere in the world in the previous 48 hours. And that means that infections and diseases that you read about in textbooks as students and dismiss, actually could be on your doorstep. That’s never more true now than at any point in human history. We live in a globalised world and our approach to medicine has to reflect that.”

Name: Stephen Owens (left)
Job title: Consultant Paediatrician – Infectious Diseases and Immunology
Years as a health professional: 23 years
NHS Trust/Hospital: Great North Children’s Hospital, Newcastle.
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Saving lives in emergencies