Global Health Implementation

The School of Medicine formally launched its Global Health Implementation Programme, in partnership with Malawi's College of Medicine, in December 2014. Following a donation of £1 million by Ann Gloag, Professor William Stones was appointed to lead the initiative, working alongside Dr Bernadette O'Hare, sharing their time between Malawi and St Andrews. They work closely with senior researchers at St Andrews, particularly Professor Stephen Gillespie, whose group is generating innovative solutions to problems of infection in the developing world.

Professor
William Stones

Kondwani Katundu,
PhD Student

The Programme builds on the ties that have existed historically between Scotland and Malawi as well as more recently established working links between St Andrews and Malawi's College of Medicine. Throughout the last decade, St Andrews has supported the College of Medicine in a wide range of areas, from the development of its curriculum to the installation of its IT systems. The Global Health Implementation Programme builds on the relationships that have been established and exists not just to examine issues that affect healthcare in the developing world, but focuses on practical opportunities for improvement.

Professor William Stones, alongside his clinical work as an obstetrician and gynaecologist, is leading a wide-ranging research programme. He is supported by Dr Bernadette O'Hare, a paediatrician in Malawi, and colleagues across St Andrews, who are available to supervise the Global Health Implementation students. The first four PhD students, all Malawian, have now begun their studies. Their diverse subjects reflect the wide-ranging healthcare challenges in the developing world, but also the breadth of research at St Andrews: Alcohol and substance misuse in Malawi (joint supervision between the School of Medicine and NHS Fife consultants); Transparency of healthcare financing (School of Management); A new model for research into African Sleeping Sickness (School of Biology) and Recognition of Acute Sepsis (School of Medicine).

Dr Bernadette O'Hare and two colleagues at Malawi's College of Medicine

Ten students began the new Masters in Global Health Implementation in September 2015. This one-year course is based in St Andrews within the School of Medicine, but draws on expertise at the College of Medicine. In addition, the permanent base in St Andrews now provides an entry point for undergraduate medical students keen to gain experience in the developing world and for academics across St Andrews to develop their research in Malawi.

A spotlight on three research projects which are currently underway:

Dr O'Hare has been working with Professor Elizabeth Molyneux of the College of Medicine to develop a new course 'Care of Infant and New-Born' for healthcare professionals. As part of a wide-ranging project to improve neonatal critical care, the five-day course and the associated documents, such as admissions charges and care pathways, play a central role and have been adopted by Malawi's Ministry of Health.

The Child and Adolescent Health Research Unit within the School of Medicine is home to the WHO international study into Health Behaviour in School-aged Children. Drawing on the expertise of Professor Candace Currie, a new research project has been established in Malawi which will examine health and behaviour of 10–14 year-olds, in collaboration with a global network of adolescence researchers led from Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. A three-year longitudinal survey, it will track young people through this crucial phase and provide a context for other research that helps to improve our understanding of young people's lives so as to increase their resilience and reduce vulnerability in these critical years.

Dr Andrew Blaikie, Honorary Senior Lecturer in Ophthalmology, has undertaken extensive work in low and middle-income countries. This year he has been engaged in a distribution and training initiative in Malawi with the inventor of the Arclight device: a small, lightweight, solar-powered LED ophthalmoscope and otoscope. This low-cost innovation, combined with the training given in the recognition and treatment pathway of eye and ear problems, was given to healthcare professionals and students (doctors, nurses, optometrists and clinical officers).

Dr Blaikie followed this up with an assessment of the effectiveness of this approach by using feedback from the trained users of the Arclight. It received an excellent response which has prompted advanced discussions with Malawi's Ministry of Health to include the Arclight as part of standard equipment for all senior health assessment assistants.