Sharing expertise through the VISION 2020 LINKS Programme

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VISION 2020 LINKS Programme

• Since 2004, 25 VISION 2020 LINKS have been established in Africa
• LINKS build skills of whole eye care team to address priority needs
• LINKS typically offer subspecialist training for ophthalmologists, specialist training for nurses, technician training eg. equipment maintenance
VISION 2020 LINKS in Africa and the UK

The Gambia – SZRECC + Swansea – Singleton Hospital
Nigeria – Kano + Londonderry – WHSCT
Nigeria – Lagos + R Bolton
Ghana – Accra + Moorfields Eye Hospital
Ghana – Kumasi + Crewe – Leighton
Zambia – Livingstone + N Staffs
Zambia – Lusaka + Brighton – BSUH
Zambia – Kitwe + Frimley – FPH
Botswana – Gaborone + Cambridge – Addenbrooke’s
Sudan – Gezira/Juba + Norwich NNUH
Ethiopia – Gondar + Leicester LRI
Ethiopia – Addis Ababa + Stoke Mandeville Bucks
Ethiopia – Yirgalem + N Wales – HM Stanley Hospital
Uganda – Mbarara + Bristol Eye Hospital
Uganda – Makerere + London – Royal Free
Kenya – Nairobi EACO + London – RCOphth
Kenya – Mombasa + Southampton
Tanzania – Moshi + Birmingham – Univ Hospitals and also a Club Jules Gonin link for VR
Tanzania – Dar es Salaam + St Thomas’ Hospital
Malawi – Zomba + Newport Wales
Malawi – Blantyre + Glasgow – Yorkhill
Malawi – Lilongwe + Edinburgh PAEP
Madagascar + Leeds St James’ Hospital
Zimbabwe – Harare + Bart’s
Swaziland – Siteki + SPRROG and also a Club Jules Gonin link
Working together

To make LINKS work the following are needed:

• A few highly motivated people on both sides of the LINK (volunteers)
• Toolkit – guidelines for running the LINK
• A three-year Activity Plan based on priority needs and objectives and available personnel
• Funding for the activities in the Plan
• Coordination of the LINKS by a central team of staff who have overview of the whole programme
• Ongoing communication, fundraising, monitoring, reporting and sharing learning
Key people in the LINKS Programme

- Funders for the Programme and the individual links, particularly Sightsavers and CBM for core programme
- Steering Committee overseeing LINKS Programme, chaired by Allen Foster
- Link Co-ordinators, UK and Africa, who lead each LINK, with support from their Steering Group
- Agreement by senior management in Africa and UK training institutions/hospitals (signed MOU)
- Participants in LINK training visits: ophthalmologists, nurses, managers, orthoptists, optometrists, anaesthetists, equipment technicians
Benefits of LINKS - skills transfer in the clinic

Examples:

- Clearer roles and deployment within the team
- Nurse-led clinics established eg. glaucoma, children
- Enhanced working environment eg. space better used, defined children’s waiting area
- Implementation of protocols and procedures eg. patient assessment, children’s vision testing
Benefits of LINKS - skills transfer in theatre

Examples:

- Paediatric cataract surgical services (eg Malawi, Tanzania, Swaziland)
- VR services (eg KCMC, Malawi)
- Diabetic retinopathy services (eg Tanzania, Uganda, Botswana)
- Oculoplastics services (eg Zambia)
- Enhanced theatre organisation and patient flow
- Improved patient safety and infection control
Benefits of LINKS to UK partners

- Enhance teaching skills and gain exposure to diseases seen only rarely in the UK
- Reinforce the value of early presentation, diagnosis and treatment
- Improve staff morale
- Build team working
- Increase appreciation of the NHS
- Build international friendships
• Establishing modular training courses, accredited by WACS, that will contribute to the development of sub-specialist ophthalmologists for the region
Lagos-Bolton VISION 2020 LINK

• Enhancing skills, particularly in vitreoretinal surgery and paediatric ophthalmology

• Developing leadership skills within the whole eye care team
Monitoring progress of LINKS

- Each LINK builds monitoring into its activities from the outset
- Clearly defined objectives are essential at the start, as is baseline data
- But each LINK is different
- Standardising data collection across all the LINKS to show impact of the Programme as a whole is our next goal
Sharing learning within a LINK

- A long-term LINK between two institutions builds trust and openness to share problems and work together towards appropriate solutions.
- LINKS empower individuals in each eye care team to bring about change where needed.
- Training visits to the UK enable African teams to see different ways of working.
- Learning can expand out from the Eye Department eg. senior hospital management sharing governance, finance, administration etc.
Sharing learning between LINKS

- The COECSA-RCOphth LINK is an excellent example
- The success of individual institution-institution LINKS in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda training institutions led to the request from EACO for a link with the RCOphth
- Learning in the areas of developing a professional exam, curriculum harmonisation, train the trainers and guideline development is now being shared between all eight countries of COECSA
Sharing learning widely

• Biannual LINKS workshops in Africa or UK
• Build networks in subspecialist areas eg paeds, diabetic retinopathy
• Foster high-level ownership (MoH take on financial responsibility for improved services)
• Foster south-south LINKS
• Learn from other countries’ health link exchanges
• Offer advice/consultancy to other countries wishing to establish their own VISION 2020 LINKS Programmes using this framework
VISION 2020 Links Programme team

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