

Press release: Jeremy Hunt calls for global focus on patient safety

The Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, has announced £70 million over three and a half years for the Better Health Programme, a range of health initiatives that could improve the lives of up to 150 million people across 8 emerging economies.

Speaking in the margins of the World Health Assembly on Monday, Mr Hunt will also call for a new World Patient Safety Day to highlight the importance of patient safety globally. The UK and Kenya have co-sponsored a resolution on Global Action on Patient Safety at the World Health Assembly. The resolution has support from more than 30 countries internationally. A decision on whether the resolution will be adopted will be made later in the week.

Speaking ahead of the event, the Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, said:

WHO Director General Dr Tedros has been inspirational in driving forward improvements in patient safety globally. The next big moment is the motion this week which will create a World Patient Safety Day to shine a spotlight on how to reduce the million deaths every year from medical error. Today we call on our friends and partners across the world to support our motion at the World Health Assembly, get behind us, and make this change to help save so many lives.

Director General of the World Health Organisation, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said:

The more focus we can bring to the cause of patient safety across the world, the more lives we will be able to save which is why I am grateful to the UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt for leading the global campaign on patient safety. I urge all countries to adopt the World Health Assembly's motion next week, and put this issue at the top of the global health agenda.

Patient harm in healthcare is one of the top ten causes of death and disability in the world. Two-thirds of cases occur in low- and middle-income countries where as many as 1 in 4 patients are harmed unnecessarily while receiving healthcare.

The Better Health Programme will help to reduce the growing burden of diseases such as diabetes, cancer and heart disease. It will improve clinical processes such as the recording of preventable deaths, hospital governance and quality of care in up to 4,000 hospitals.

Technology will be at the heart of the Better Health Programme, whose digital health track will boost the potential for health professionals to provide services to women, hard to reach groups and those in rural areas. Better Health will also provide education and training for health workers, helping to drive up care quality and will draw on UK best practice to strengthen the monitoring the performance of staff, hospitals and clinics to reduce deaths, infections and improve patient safety.

The money for the Better Health Programme comes from the Prosperity Fund, which ensures that aid tackles poverty overseas, and also delivers for the UK. Provisional estimates are that the programme could generate an average £1.30 for each £1 invested locally, and a similar amount in terms of exports for the UK. British businesses are well-placed to respond to commercial opportunities arising from the programme.

Additional Information

- Four delivery partners are being contracted, following a competitive process, to deliver the programme and will be responsible for the delivery of programme.
- The programme will operate in 8 ODA eligible countries Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar.
- FCO-led 3.5 year programme, developed in consultation with the UK Departments of Health, International Development and Trade, with the assistance of UK government health organisations.
- UK Health Services Exports are worth 1.7bn or 0.7% of overall services exports (2016).

Further information