

Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and
Development Affairs
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
King Charles Street
London, SW1A 2AH

Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP
Secretary of State
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London, SW1H 0EU

23 August 2021

Dear Secretary of States,

We write with considerable concern about the current situation regarding essential healthcare and the pandemic in Zambia, Kenya, Uganda and other low and middle-income countries (LMIC), and urge the UK government to actively increase its support in managing this through ensuring increased global access to COVID-19 vaccines and in reversal of the recent loss of significant UK aid funding.

We are a royal college, professional associations, and charities representing UK anaesthetists working in the NHS. UK anaesthetists have a long history of supporting the development of safe surgery and critical care overseas. Through international partnerships, anaesthetists have been using their knowledge and skills to support pandemic management worldwide.

As we write, many LMICs globally have recently experienced their highest daily positive COVID-19 cases and mortalities since the pandemic began¹, including Zambia, Uganda and Kenya. In many countries, multiple hospitals including COVID-19 centres report they are unable to take any further admissions, there are no remaining critical care beds nationally, oxygen capacity and delivery devices are depleted, and mortuaries are full. Colleagues have reported that young patients including pregnant women and healthcare workers seem to be at greater risk of death than seen previously. The strain and surge has debilitated hospitals, suggesting that there is a real risk of a complete collapse of multiple health systems.

Despite these vulnerabilities, high-income country engagement in COVAX and other initiatives to provide vaccine access in LMICs has been insufficient for effective vaccination programmes to have been implemented^{2,3}. Large outbreaks lead to new variants, often more transmissible and virulent, and resulting in higher numbers of critically unwell patients. We have already seen these variants of concern reach the UK causing local outbreaks and again greater pressure on the NHS.

We are also gravely concerned about the impact of reduction in overseas development aid. It is reported that funding from the UK for international development has fallen by 65% to Africa, and similar amounts to other global regions⁴. The abrupt withdrawal of current UK Aid programs has already reduced the capacity of health systems to provide essential care and will result in global regression against the UN sustainable development goals, of which the UK are a member state.

Pandemic management in the UK requires every country in the world to be able to effectively manage outbreaks and case numbers. This in turn needs strong, resilient health systems able to provide COVID-19 vaccination programmes, successful public health information, and deal promptly and effectively with outbreaks. Health systems must also be able to provide essential hospital care in a way that does not increase the risk of hospital-acquired COVID-19 infection for patients and staff. It is these healthcare systems, at risk following loss of UK Aid funding, which we in the UK are depending on to ensure global outbreaks are well managed.

The UK has a significant role to play in preventing the emergence of new variants and ending this pandemic globally. We urge the government to provide more doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to low- and middle-income countries, to urgently reverse the decision to cut UK aid funding, and to use its position on the international stage to improve collaborative working with LMIC governments in the management of this pandemic. Until every country in the world

¹WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) dashboard. Available at: <https://covid19.who.int/table>

²Ghebreyesus TA. I run the WHO and I know that rich countries must make a choice. The New York Times, 2021. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/22/opinion/who-covid-vaccines.html>

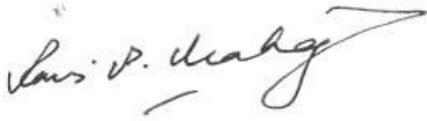
³Harman S, et al. *BMJ Global Health* 2021;6:e006504

⁴African Countries facing 66% cut in aid, UK charities say, The Guardian, 2021. Availability at:

https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/apr/28/african-countries-facing-66-cut-in-uk-aid-charities-say?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

has vaccination programs and systems able to manage outbreaks, the health of the people of the United Kingdom continues to remain at greater risk from COVID-19.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Ravi Mahajan
President, The Royal College of Anaesthetists



Dr Ann Harvey
Chair, International Relations Committee,
Association of Anaesthetists



Dr Dylan Bould
Chair, Global Anaesthesia Development Partnerships



Ms Kris Torgeson
Global CEO, Lifebox



Mr Julian Gore-Booth
CEO, World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists
Secretary, World Federation of Societies of
Anaesthesiologists (UK)



Dr Tom Bashford
President, World Anaesthesia Society



Dr Roger Eltringham
Founder and Medical Director, Safe Anaesthesia Worldwide



Dr Phil McDonald
Medical Director and Trustee, Operation Smile UK



Dr Reema Patel
President, Global Anaesthesia, Surgery and Obstetric
Collaboration



Dr Sophie Morris
Chair, Brighton- Zambia Anaesthesia Partnership
Treasurer, Brighton-Lusaka Health Link



Dr Mark Thomas
President, Association of Paediatric
Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland



Dr Chris Elton
President, Obstetric
Anaesthetists' Association



Professor Alan Macfarlane
President, RA-UK

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