Audiology in developing African countries and ethical volunteering

Lucy Carter, CEO
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WHO 2013: 360m people worldwide with disabling hearing loss (32m children).

Prevalence of disabling hearing loss is greatest in poor countries.

In UK, there is approx. one audiologist per 25,000 people. In most of “our” countries: ZERO audiologists; ENT doctors also in short supply.

Hearing loss more damaging for people in developing countries - less assistance, stigma, fewer educational opportunities, much harder to find work ➔ poverty
Give a man a fish...

- Sound Seekers was formerly known as The Commonwealth Society for the Deaf, est. 1959.
- Founded by Lady Templer, wife of the High Commissioner of Malaya (now Malaysia), who felt compelled to act after seeing the plight of deaf children there.
- Originally a paternalistic approach – material support to schools and hospitals, ‘expert’ visits.
Teach a man to fish...

- Partnership with Ministries of Health to assist in establishing/developing audiology capacity through:
  - Sponsoring training of audiological assistants (one year diploma at University of Nairobi)
  - Provision of equipment and furnishing of basic audiology department.
  - HARK (Hearing Assessment and Research Clinic) vehicles.

...but
Overwhelming demand (first time audiology services available)

Overwhelmed audiological assistants – too few in number, only one year of training, no quality supervision.
We need to create a volunteer army

- Ideally we would train an army of audiologists for Africa – but £££££ we don’t have.
- We are exploring scholarship opportunities to train at least one audiologist per country.
- But meanwhile – junior audiology staff in our seven project countries desperate for help!
Why is this volunteering ‘ethical’?

- **Sound Seekers volunteers:**
  - Build the capacity of local staff to provide quality services, rather than simply flying in to provide services themselves.
  - Are affiliated with an established organisation, not on a solo mission. Volunteer feedback and advice can be followed up on.
  - Raise funds towards their trips themselves – means a lot to health staff in Africa who are usually on very low salaries.
  - Hopefully have a great time and will want to stay involved (both in and out of UK).
Example: Laura Finegold in The Gambia

- Currently training on the NHS Scientist Training Programme (STP) at King Edward VII Hospital, Windsor.
- For her six week elective, she is in The Gambia working with the Sound Seekers team.
- She raised approx. £3,500 to fund her trip and further equipment needed in the project.
Laura in The Gambia cont.

- Her Terms of Reference include:
  - Skills inventory of current team
  - Classroom-based and on-the-job training
  - Participate in outreach clinics
  - Train team leader on new reporting format
  - Equipment inventory and advice on calibration/repair/replacement

- Upcoming volunteer positions include:
  - Similar role to Laura’s available in Ghana
  - Volunteers needed to work alongside newly trained audiological assistants in Cameroon, Malawi and Zambia
  - Volunteers needed to provide refresher training in our other countries
Non-audiology volunteers

Emma Case - Photographer. Also volunteered for Sound Seekers in Zambia in September 2012.
Interested?

- If you are interested in volunteering for Sound Seekers, please email Emily at projects@sound-seekers.org.uk and provide:
  - An up-to-date CV
  - Likely availability (time of year and length of time)
- Two weeks – absolute minimum
- Unless going as part of a generously funded project, volunteers will be asked to fundraise for:
  - Flights, visas
  - Accommodation
  - Insurance
  - Vaccinations, malaria prophylaxis
- Volunteers to pay for own meals

Sound Seekers can help you with fundraising.
Thank you!

Or, as one of our partners in Cameroon says, “Thank you immensely”