

An update of the 2010 paper on health and healthcare in the British Overseas Territories: Regional and UK Government support

In September 2010 the Department of Health, in close collaboration with FCO and DFID, produced a report on health and healthcare systems in the Overseas Territories.¹ The report provides an analysis of health and healthcare challenges; an overview of the systems and ways of delivering healthcare in the Territories and the actors involved; and recommendations for actions going forward.

The report was commissioned in response to a commitment contained in the UK's Global Health Strategy to outline current and future support to the UK's Overseas Territories, and aimed to stimulate thinking about how governments and organisations can work together to improve the OTs' access to regional and HMG resources.

The report provided examples of a number of ways in which the Overseas Territories are being assisted by HMG and other organisations, including the European Commission, the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). There are a number of priority issues highlighted in 2010, on which there is subsequent progress to report:

- **International Health Regulations**

The International Health Regulations (IHR) are an international legal instrument that is binding for 194 countries, including all the Member States of the WHO, which includes the UK and its Overseas Territories. Their purpose is to help the international community prevent and respond to acute public health risks that have the potential to cross borders and threaten people worldwide. The Regulations entered into force in 2007, with a deadline for compliance of June 2012.

¹ Financial support was provided by DFID.

The Department of Health is working with the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Health Protection Agency to assist the Overseas Territories to achieve a good standard of compliance with the IHR, recognising that there are particular challenges involved for small island states. Discussions are ongoing with PAHO, the WHO and the European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC) to determine how to assess compliance for small island territories as well as how we can support the OTs to reach that standard.

- **Mental Health**

An area identified in the 2010 report as a particular challenge was the difficulty experienced in the majority of the OTs of how best to deal with patients with mental health problems – many of whom may end up in prison due to a lack of alternative facilities or treatment. The Department of Health is working with Health Action Partnerships International (HAPI) in order to better understand the nature and scale of the issues, and consider how best to support the OTs in a sustainable and effective way. A mapping study has been carried out in the East Caribbean. There is considerable interest from the Royal College of Psychiatrists in the idea of establishing longer term peer support, exchange and training for the different professionals concerned with this issue.

- **Pandemic Influenza**

Pandemic influenza presents potential challenges for the Overseas Territories, just as they do for other countries. Most of the Caribbean OTs confirmed cases of H1N1 in the recent pandemic of 2009. The Department of Health made available both antiviral medicines and pandemic vaccines to the OTs during the pandemic at cost price, and put in place arrangements to ensure supplies are available in any future such emergency.

- **Caribbean Public Health Agency**

Working through Health Action Partnership International (HAPI), DH has provided financial support for the development of a Caribbean Public Health Agency, from existing public health institutions in the region. This technical assistance is ongoing and is focussed on assisting with change management and human resource issues.

- **Health Financing in Anguilla**

Working through HAPI, DH has provided technical support and guidance to the Ministry of Health and Social Development of Anguilla to prioritise and cost its National Health Strategic Plan. Learning from this has been offered to other UK OTs in the region.

- **Medical Complaints Procedure in St Helena**

DH has provided constructive inputs to a draft medical complaints procedure prepared by St Helena Health and Social Welfare Directorate. This has since been finalised and is in use.

- **The Healthy Caribbean Coalition**

This coalition of interested parties has been set up to share learning about non-communicable diseases in the region, including UK OTs as well as other members of CARICOM. This has been supported by funding from DH, with HAPI continuing to provide technical assistance.

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