DPhil student James O'Donovan awarded British Medical Association grant to fund project in Uganda

Monday, 12 March 2018

Congratulations to postgraduate student James O'Donovan (2017, DPhil in Education), who has recently been awarded a competitive grant for £8000 from the British Medical Association to fund a research project he is running in Uganda as part of his DPhil project. The project is to support the development and evaluation of a World Health Organisation training programme in Ear and Hearing Care for Community Health Workers in rural Uganda.

James's background is as a medical doctor. He previously worked at Addenbrookes Hospital in Cambridge and was a Kennedy Scholar at The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University and a Visiting Research Fellow at Massachusetts General Hospital where he focussed on Global Health. James is now studying for a DPhil in the Department of Education with Professor Niall Winters and the Learning and New Technologies Research Group, funded by a Clarendon Scholarship and a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council (read his online profile here [2]). His research interests surround the use of technologies to train health workers in resource-poor environments, taking a participant-based approach to healthcare systems strengthening.
James has run a UK-based charity Elimu Health [3] since 2014. It focuses on establishing partnerships with NGOs and governments based in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) to provide world-class, evidence-based healthcare training using low-cost technology. In 2015, Elimu Health formed a partnership with a US-Ugandan NGO, Omni Med, to establish mobile based training programmes for a cadre of health workers known as Community Health Workers (CHWs). CHWs are lay people who receive basic health training to help address the shortage of professional health workers in resource-poor countries.

“The British Medical Association Charitable Arm and Velji Foundation previously awarded us a significant grant in 2016 to train 160 CHWs across the Mukono district of Uganda on the recognition, prevention and management of childhood pneumonia using locally made videos loaded onto ultra low-cost Android tablets, explained James. “Following the success of that project we have been awarded a further grant to establish the first known primary ear care training programme for CHWs in Uganda. Hearing loss is an important problem to address since it is estimated to affect 6.8% of the world’s population and has enormous impacts both at an individual level and a societal level. It is a particularly important problem in LMICs like Uganda since they often lack specially trained health professionals to manage the burden of disease.

Therefore to address this shortage of trained health professionals we will be working with the WHO Hearing and Deafness Group to train CHWs in the Mukono District of Uganda on the recognition, prevention and treatment of common ear diseases that may lead to hearing loss if not managed correctly. We will do this through designing a participant-led training module based on WHO guidelines and hosted on appropriate hardware. We will work closely with local CHWs, Omni Med and the Ugandan health authorities to ensure local suitability and buy-in.

In addition to the grant from the BMA, James has also won a Santander Academic Travel Award which he plans to use in August to establish a research collaboration with the Global eHealth Unit at Nanyang Technical University in Singapore, where he will be leading a WHO-commissioned project on the role of mobile technologies to train CHWs in LMICs.

Source URL: http://www.seh.ox.ac.uk/news/dphil-student-james-odonovan-awarded-british-medical-association-grant-fund-project-uganda

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[2] https://www.granduniondtp.ac.uk/people/james-odonovan