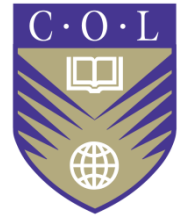


# Summary: Health

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*Livelihoods theme leaders: Sharon Huttly, Professor of  
Postgraduate Education in International Health, London School of  
Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Ian Pringle, Education  
Specialist - Media, Commonwealth of Learning.*

*Summary delivered by Sharon Huttly & Ian Pringle*

Health was the smallest of the four themes but as a relatively new area for COL and PCF this enabled focused discussions on some core topics, frank exchanges about difficulties as well as successes, and an opportunity for people to get to know each other. We feel that it is best to see the theme as the start of a conversation set to continue beyond PCF5.

There were some 40 people presenting under this theme from 15 countries across all Commonwealth regions and other parts of the world. There were 10 sessions, including two workshops, held over two days. Three main topics were covered - HIV/AIDS; health worker training; and, Open Educational Resources and working across borders.

## **A. HIV/AIDS**

The HIV/AIDS stream started with a challenge and a call to action, articulated by Prof. Lidia Brito in her keynote address on Wednesday morning: AIDS is STILL an emergency, we are STILL in a crisis and perhaps most importantly we are "running out of time."

Prevention strategies to date - including, perhaps particularly education - have not stopped the spread of the virus: in many areas of the world infection rates continue to rise. Despite many efforts to introduce awareness and education campaigns, too often, secondary schools - and we know that youth are one of the most at-risk groups - there is absolutely no health education, let alone on AIDS.

We need a radical rethink in terms of how to go forward with learning about HIV/AIDS. In truth, we do have many of the answers, many were represented in PCF5 discussions themselves; we know where to find many other answers them, e.g. at the International AIDS conference, which will take place in Mexico

City next month (August 2008), bringing together some 20,000 delegates to share the latest information about the pandemic.

The real challenge is the modalities of how we work; how we join up different strategies and activities; how we start to work across the domains we represent: education, media, health, ODL, new ICTs, community development, etc.

The PCF5 Health Theme identified a series of critical areas, including

- Integrated approaches - bring together Education with the Economic and Social; ODL, from OERs to community radio can address the pandemic in multiple ways, from prevention awareness to treatment literacy to health worker training
- Community approaches that fully take into account cultural contexts and allow for collective learning and values
- Reaching young people in schools: given the mortality rates and the staggering consequences and social and financial costs, these are LIFE skills in the truest sense; we've heard impressive success stories about peer education using drama and village cinema, and more formal ODL programmes - in some cases compulsory - about HIV in secondary school and college environments
- Where are the mobiles? While new ICTs offer great potential - and we have heard some exceptional stories from countries like South Africa and India - we also need doable solutions, including simple, appropriate, low-cost technologies -- we've heard at PCF5 about schools in bags and boxes, radio, theatre; we have heard some remarkable and inspiring examples, from Sierra Leone and The Gambia, to India and Bangladesh, from Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.
- Perhaps most importantly traditional and new media and content technologies are, far from mutually exclusive, essentially complementary in mediating linguistic and cultural gaps

## B. Health Worker Training

In respect of health worker training, PCF sessions made it clear that ODL is a key tool, one with the potential to make a critical difference to health where it matters. From surgeons to community health workers, from autism to diabetes, we have again heard remarkable stories and examples of people learning new skills and gaining new knowledge through creative means. ODL reaches health care workers where they are - and more importantly where they need to be, i.e. in health care clinics at the community level.

ODL is particularly relevant and impactful in respect of professional development and continuing education. Institutions need to think carefully and identify where knowledge and skills are deficient, for example care of people with disabilities or surgical skills and then tailor ODL programmes to address

these needs. In this sense ODL has huge potential to focus on specific national or local needs - be it diabetes or HIV - by addressing particular areas of health worker learning.

The use of ODL also tends to build communities of support and of practice; ODL not only develops skills but also understanding and compassion, changing prevailing attitudes.

Ensuring there is sufficient recognition, e.g. accreditation and certification, to motivate health workers to supplement their knowledge and skills is critical for long term success and impact.

## Open Educational Resources

The main points from this stream were:

OER are a great resource, particularly in terms of working across borders, but, like cigarette packets, they need a health warning attached - issues include content relevance, cost of adaptation, technology for delivery, and the resources to use the (OE) resources are all critically important and need further discussion.

Raising awareness of what's out there already and what's coming along soon are need - PCF5 has helped but that awareness raising needs to continue.

Getting feedback on the use of OER is difficult and hence good evaluation of them is a challenge.

Very interesting initiatives such as the People's University (which addresses public health at tertiary education level), and HEAT (Health Education And Training) in Africa which will target Community Health Workers, have been explored at PCF5. These are relatively fledgling activities at present but by PCF6 there should be much more to say.

In the very final session, we heard about some exciting projects using IT of different types to work across borders/across continents to develop and/or use resources for the improvement of health. There are some great success stories but also challenges, such as how to continue activities beyond the funding of time-limited projects.

## Theme papers and discussions identified a number of ways forward:

- Build integrated communities through practical partnerships: connect the dots from the bottom up, over and across.
- Contribute across the board to the development of simple, open, user driven repository of ideas and materials - e.g. WikiEducator

PCF5 has certainly helped to solidify COL's programme stream for health with a focus on AIDS, and likewise the commitment and direction of the University of London.

Participants in the theme have already taken some initiative, bringing together the National Institute of Distance Education (INED) and the Foundation for Community Development in Mozambique along with COL and University of London, and with links to other partners to discuss how to action an integrated ODL response to HIV/AIDS along the lines suggested by Lidia Brito's in her challenge yesterday

Our thanks to all of you who contributed to the success of the Health Theme at PCF5, especially to the PCF5 programme team, to Professor Lidia Brito for her excellent keynote, to the health theme presenters for their insightful and inspiring papers; and also to our session facilitators and reporters.