

## **Minutes - 'Preparing for the Next Pandemic: The Role of Vaccine Research & Development'**

*Wednesday 12th July 2023, 11am-12pm, Room R in Portcullis House*

**Attendees:** 27

### **1. Introduction**

Dr Philippa Whitford MP (PW) began by noting the impact of COVID-19 and how it highlighted the importance of investing in pandemic prevention, preparedness and response (PPPR). She emphasised that, although pandemics have been on the risk register since 2009, it remained a neglected area of interest and investment, particularly in the context of wider cuts such as that of the Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) budget.

PW then gave the floor to Professor Dame Jenny Harries (JH), Chief Executive of the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).

### **2. Keynote speech by JH**

JH began by discussing the importance of vaccines, along with other new tools that are available to help prepare for and mitigate the threat of pandemics. JH addressed the importance of retaining science experts and partnerships between the public, private, and academic sectors for pandemic preparedness. She emphasised that, in the context of increasing climate change and urbanisation, a response plan for a major crisis like a pandemic both nationally and internationally is urgently needed.

JH noted that the UKHSA was born during a pandemic and has since consolidated various parts of the UK Government into its jurisdiction, such as the NHS Track and Trace and the Vaccine Task Force. She also mentioned that it'd be important to keep the COVID-19 Vaccine Network within the agency so as to maintain its relationship with the private sector. This led to a broader point on the requirement for transparency around data and communicating with the private sector about what vaccines may need to be in the pipeline to complement wider disease threat surveillance. JH also mentioned the newly established Centre for Vaccine Development and Evaluation within UKHSA.

The 100 Days Mission (100DM) – a target to develop a vaccine for a new pandemic-level pathogen within 100 days – was also discussed as an important part of the UK's work in this area and something they were aiming for, but that there was a need to be “realistic” in achieving this.

### **3. Keynote speech by Dr Melanie Saville (MS), Executive Director of Vaccine Research and Development at the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI)**

MS began by relaying the origins of CEPI. She stated that CEPI is a global partnership that arose from some of the lessons learned from the Ebola crisis, such as the need for public and private partnerships to support the development of vaccines for emerging pathogens. MS outlined the part that CEPI played in COVAX, and noted that CEPI has returned to “preparedness mode” with a view towards the 100DM.

MS also touched on the paradigm shift that has occurred regarding preparedness within the research and development (R&D) space, mentioning the goal to develop a prototype vaccine library that has already been tested on humans so as to have a bank of information and products ready for similar pathogens. She also mentioned work done on R&D infrastructure, such as clinical trial networks to ensure that vaccines can be rapidly tested when new pathogens appear.

Finally, MS noted that they were now in their new strategy ‘CEPI 2.0’ and expressed gratitude for the UK’s contribution to this space, reiterating that equitable access is a priority to the Coalition.

### **4. Keynote speech by Professor Pontiano Kaleebu (PK), Director of the Uganda Virus Research Institute (UVRI)**

PK began by introducing the idea of our global community as “one village” in the context of PPPR, vaccine access, and UVRI’s background working on pathogens such as HIV, Zika virus, and West Nile virus. It was noted that the institution works with international partners, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine on activities such as surveillance, early detection, and virus characterisation to prevent pandemics. PK highlighted UVRI’s role in the response to pathogens such as HIV, Ebola, and other emerging illnesses in tandem with partners such as the World Health Organization (WHO), CEPI and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

PK continued by stating that the global COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of vaccines, both in terms of development and delivery. He noted that there is limited capacity in Africa for vaccine production, even though the continent is statistically a likely location for a pandemic to begin. Although partnerships in this area are being carried out with organisations and institutions like Imperial College London, funding is still limited.

PK pointed out that this is also connected to a current problem: ongoing endemic diseases and the urgent need to develop vaccines to combat them, such as for malaria and tuberculosis, but there was a lack of political will and adequate financing. He noted that the UK Government has not looked into the economic benefit of vaccine R&D for these endemic diseases.

PK finished his speech by emphasising the importance of working together to address outbreaks that are already being experienced.

## **5. First response by Eloise Todd (ET), Executive Director and Co-Founder of the Pandemic Action Network (PAN)**

ET began by acknowledging that, in 2020, although a large public health advocacy ecosystem existed, there was a relatively small focus on pandemic prevention. She emphasised that there is an urgent need to break the “panic and neglect” cycle that currently plagues PPPR. It was also noted that, although examples like the Pandemic Fund are a step in the right direction, there remains a need for funds to trickle down to the country and regional levels.

ET reiterated PK's perspective on the world being ‘one village’, but that the threat of pandemics will remain until we think more innovatively about how to finance pandemic preparedness. She acknowledged that, despite many wanting to avoid the memories of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential that those working in advocacy work to persuade politicians and the general population that investments for pandemic preparedness must be made now.

ET also mentioned CEPI and congratulated their work in the PPPR space. It was stressed that a case needs to be made for more permanent funding for domestic and global pandemic preparation, and that new ways of funding must be generated so as to not further strain the ODA budget and the defence budget in light of the conflict in Ukraine.

Finally, it was emphasised that the UK must develop an architecture for domestic funding, and that advocacy voices need to stress the need for new budgets that could come from areas like the R&D budget from the UK's Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT).

## **6. Q&A between speakers and attendees**

Questions were asked by the audience to the panel, which included themes of: reframing pandemic threats as a security and defence issue; the effect that climate change has on heightening the risk of pandemics; learning lessons from endemic diseases and low- and middle-income countries' experiences when developing vaccines; the short-termism of our political systems and how it prevents politicians from thinking ahead and preparing for future crises and pandemics; the importance of institutions like UKSHA not only to prevent the next health emergency but as a mechanism to build on UK science capacity; how surveillance can implement a ‘one health’ approach; and data transparency as a vital tool for PPPR.

## **7. Conclusion & AOB**

PW thanked each speaker individually and all of the attendees for joining the discussion.



The All-Party Parliamentary Group on

# Vaccinations for All

She also thanked RESULTS UK for organising the event and coordinating the Group.

**Event ended.**