

## Cambridge academics work with Africans to address global health issues

Global health, and in particular emerging infectious diseases, is a theme of extensive research within Cambridge. I spoke to Professor James Wood, leader of the Cambridge Infectious Diseases group and head of the Department of Veterinary Medicine, to find out about what is being done in Cambridge and elsewhere to improve health and tackle infectious disease globally.

The ethos behind global health is based on both democracy and context: all global citizens deserve equal access to the healthcare they require, depending on the associated diseases of different locations and socio-economic backgrounds that determine an individual's health. Much of the research of Wood's group is based in West Africa. "If you want to understand the processes of disease emergence, you have to work in areas where these diseases most emerge and if you look at all of the work that's been done in evaluating this, the tropics are hotspots."



Wood's research has a particularly interesting focus, looking at the crossover between human and animal diseases – in his words, "trying to understand the process of spillover and the human responses to the spillover". This, of course, is all in an effort "to try and mitigate the risks of people suffering from these diseases". Following the Ebola epidemic, the group have recently expanded their research to the Kenema Hospital in Sierra Leone, one of the major treatment facilities. The key idea is to focus on both the medical science and the socio-personal effects of this deadly infection, alongside the Institute of Development Studies in Brighton.

This longer-term work is coupled with more short-term efforts by other Cambridge departments. "I think the work that Ian Goodfellow, in the virology division of the Pathology department, has done on Ebola diagnosis, setting up a lab and a sequencing facility in Sierra Leone with Wellcome Trust funding, is really exciting. It's a great example of how response to a really big problem can actually be turned into longer-term advantage for the local community."

Yet global health need not, and indeed must not, be limited to simply the exchange of empirical research and technological innovations. Wood suggests that efforts to overcome obstacles that inhibit health-care workers and systems' ability to carry out necessary research and provide effective treatment are equally fundamental in shaping the future landscape of global health. Africa Day, which took place last Tuesday at Emmanuel College, exemplified some of the efforts of the Cambridge-Africa programme. The project was founded by parasitologist Professor David Dunne of the Department of Pathology in 2008, supported by Wood, and has since brought in well over £10 million.

Source: the Varsity - <http://www.varsity.co.uk/science/11148>