



Wilton Park

Concept

Vaccine literacy: immunisation training for community-based health workers and immunisation professionals

Wednesday 22 July 2020 | WP1811

Virtual dialogue

Summary

COVID-19 pandemic has led to a reduction in vaccination rates, threatening health gains made through vaccination for diseases from measles through to meningitis. A recent [joint report](#) from WHO, UNICEF and GAVI estimates at least 80 million children under one are at risk of diseases like diphtheria, measles and polio. Circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic have made access to vaccination services challenging. Critical to maintaining immunisation uptake are community-based health workers and immunisation professionals. They are also critical to ensuring uptake of any new COVID-19 vaccines when they are available. The environment healthcare professionals find themselves in as a result of COVID-19 has changed. They face numerous challenges in their work, from vaccine hesitancy, failing health systems, lack of information and support and lack of resources. Training, capacity building and support networks which are context specific are paramount to supporting community-based health workers and immunisation professionals to reverse the downward trend in vaccination and address the COVID-19 pandemic.

Context and key policy issues

The Community Health Academy, the Sabin Vaccine Institute and Ariadne Labs are hosting **a half-day virtual workshop, facilitated by Wilton Park**, to discuss coordination of activities and investment around immunisation training for community-based health workers and immunisation professionals. The discussion will be situated within the broader context of current COVID-19 research and development of guidance on vaccine literacy, acceptance, delivery and allocation, in particular taking into account issues of equity and reaching vulnerable populations, wherever they are in the world.

'As health systems around the world continue to grapple with containing COVID-19, immunisation professionals are navigating a landscape of great uncertainty to ensure that critical, life-saving vaccines reach those who need them most.'

(Fluder) Siler, June 2020

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Barriers to vaccine confidence, trust and routine immunisations include lack of resources such as space, equipment, trained immunisation professionals and community-based health workers. Further challenges include difficulty in reaching populations in remote areas and informal settlements, nomadic populations, or conflict settings, as well as those that have not been reached with vaccines previously (eg the elderly). These populations are also especially hard to track over time so may receive inconsistent care or messaging. In addition, COVID-19 has led to an 'infodemic' of mis-leading and inaccurate information, resulting in uncertainty around vaccine safety, as well as providing fertile ground for anti-vaxxers who are targeting populations globally. Taken together, these challenges are already leading to a sharp decline in delivery and uptake of routine vaccinations in some countries and may contribute significantly to vaccine hesitancy once a COVID-19 vaccine candidate/s becomes available.

More than ever before, a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach is required to rebuild confidence in and access to routine immunisation, in addition to a future COVID-19 vaccine(s). Governments, donors, implementing partners, private sector, academia, communities and others need to work closely to develop immunisation communication, training and implementation strategies that reflect community, district and national level needs, whilst also situating these within the context of the broader global guidance and frameworks issued by WHO, UNICEF and others regarding COVID-19; in particular the ACT (Access to COVID-19 Tools)- Accelerator, a free standing collaborative task force mobilised to promote and accelerate the development, production and equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics, as well as the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility, which sits under the Vaccines pillar within the ACT-A, a global risk sharing and procurement mechanism that enables global collaboration and equitable access to vaccines..

There is an imperative for new thinking and new partners to address both current and future challenges building of existing partnerships, successful implementation frameworks and lessons learnt. While it is important to learn from successes of past vaccine campaigns, the tools and approaches used need to be translated into new technological forms and practices, and these tools (and the training that can be delivered via digital technologies) must be developed to build capacity for use from community level upwards.

Community-based health workers and immunisation professionals have been on the frontlines throughout the pandemic and will continue to be so for future vaccination campaigns. Listening to community-based health workers and immunization professionals at all levels- from district up to national- to understand their needs and challenges will be critical to prepare governments, donors, implementing partners and others to engage effectively and provide right-sized support to countries and to help identify and build capacity.

This dialogue seeks to address some of these challenges. Participants will be invited to consider the following three broad areas:

- **The current status of training and development of community-based health workers and immunisation professionals in different health systems;** to consider who is providing training/capacity strengthening and how is it financed? How might frameworks/models for funding be improved/optimised? Where might additional support be sought? What frameworks/principles are needed to ensure consistency and harmonisation across different health systems and training programmes?
- **The challenges of training and development of community-based health workers and immunisation professionals with regard to maintaining immunisation levels:** what aspects of maintaining immunisation levels are most

challenging? What information/toolkits are needed to support engagement required around safety and how the future COVID-19 vaccines work (once we understand which candidate vaccines make it to market), guidance on how to respond to mis- or disinformation claims/claims of poor health systems experiences/lack of trust in governments etc? How accessible are training and capacity strengthening initiatives? How regular are initiatives? How can digital platforms support training and capacity strengthening efforts? What should be core priorities for such a platform/s?

- **The likely challenges new COVID-19 vaccines are likely to bring/raise and what training, development and support might be needed to address these.** What challenges and risks might new COVID -19 vaccines raise for community-based health workers and immunisation professionals? What training, support and materials might be required to address these challenges?

This workshop links to the broader Wilton Park dialogue series on vaccine literacy and confidence in preparation for when an approved COVID-19 vaccine(s) is available (see more on this below).

As part of a call to action for increasing vaccine literacy, Wilton Park has partnered with City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate School of Public Health & Health Policy and the Vaccine Confidence Project at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. The purpose of the partnership is to *“convene and facilitate candid dialogue designed to elicit the broadest range of options from diverse stakeholders to determine how best to advance a ‘coronavirus-protected’ population – beginning with effective, measurable communications to advance public understanding of vaccination”*.

Effective communication to prepare a ‘vaccine literate’ public and persuade policymakers to trust the science and embrace new vaccines for COVID-19 as they become available must begin now. There needs to be a clear understanding globally of the critical role immunisation plays within a functioning health delivery system. For any vaccine to be effective, uptake needs to be optimised, through public education and advocacy in advance of vaccine availability as well as through training health workers.

To accomplish this, more has to be done than just investing in the expensive process of medical discovery needed to get a vaccine to market. To ensure the vaccine is actually used, investment needs to be targeted toward:

- a multi-sectoral commitment to develop trust in vaccines
- preparation of accurate and convincing information sources about vaccines
- innovative multi-media and interpersonal approaches to communicate and engage with all audiences for vaccine acceptance and uptake.

Community-based health workers and immunisation professionals are a critical pillar in a whole of society approach to preparing a ‘vaccine literate’ public and in promoting uptake of vaccines. Broader support for their work and efforts should also be considered by other sectors of society.

Goal and objectives

Effectively supported and informed community-based health workers and immunisation professionals are core to maintaining health gains from vaccination and specifically to overcoming COVID-19 when vaccines are available for uptake. This dialogue seeks to reach collective understanding of the different challenges facing community-based health workers and immunisation professionals which training, development and capacity strengthening can support. It will start to explore optimal ways to address these through enhanced coordination and collaboration of training and development programmes.

It aims at the following specific objectives:

- Broaden the network of organisations (policy, donor, academic, private sector, non-profit, and others) involved in COVID-19 efforts to ensure greater coordination and harmonisation of approaches;
- Highlight the importance and identify the components of effective immunisation training for community-based health workers and immunisation professionals, and the role that communities of practice can play; and
- Promote alignment of investments in development and implementation of immunisation training resources and programs.

Intended outcomes

- Collaborative understanding of the barriers and challenges facing community-based health workers and immunisation professionals in different aspects of immunisation in different health systems.
- Indication of how these might be addressed and a roadmap to take forward developing these solutions and implementing/operationalising them.
- Meeting outcomes will be captured in a report summarising the discussions, conclusions, policy recommendations, and actions, which will be widely circulated to interested parties and posted on Wilton Park and other websites;

Who should participate

- Community-based health workers and immunisation professionals, health systems representatives from LMICs, WHO, GAVI, donors, private sector and researchers.

Monitoring and evaluation

Wilton Park's Monitoring and Evaluation process includes follow-up with all participants, speakers and partners on planned actions. An electronic questionnaire will be completed by all participants during the meeting and a further survey conducted 3-6 months after the event.

Communications

Discussion in all Wilton Park sessions is 'off the record' and no individual speaker or participant should be quoted (nor their identity or institutional affiliation revealed) without that individual's express permission. The protocol also applies to all uses of digital and social media, both before, during and after the event.

Our communications team will develop a communications strategy to promote the themes of the event and maximise outcomes.

Format

The participatory format of the meeting, encompassing roundtable discussion during plenary sessions plus time spent in smaller breakout groups, will help generate fresh insights and analysis. It will be held on the basis of non-attributable discussion in a neutral environment designed to encourage an open and constructive exchange.

About Wilton Park

Wilton Park, an executive agency of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, is a global forum for strategic discussion organising over 60 events a year in the UK and overseas, bringing together leading representatives from the worlds of politics, business, academia, diplomacy, civil society and media. We focus on issues of international security, prosperity and justice. Our meetings provide a neutral environment for round-table discussion encouraging innovation in global thinking. Discussions are non-attributable to encourage frank exchanges and open and lively debate.

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