

Providing vaccines to charities and NGOs



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Judging by the glowing reports from the international press, the recent Global Vaccine Summit held in Abu Dhabi was a great success. Co-hosting the summit with Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, billionaire and philanthropist Bill Gates (co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation), began by praising the impact the Middle East can play in helping to eradicate diseases and improve the lives of the poor.

The importance of the Middle East's relationships with leaders in countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan was highlighted because international healthcare workers need permission to access remote and war-torn areas so that they can vaccinate against diseases. The operational challenges of immunising children in densely populated cities, hard-to-reach areas and areas of insecurity were addressed. In some parts of Pakistan, for example, nurses and immunisation workers have been killed by extremists who oppose the provision of these life-saving vaccines.

Gaining access to remote and war-torn regions for medical aid is something that I spoke of in my last article. Durbin's Sales to NGOs & Charities division specialises in

supplying to charities and NGOs who are working in developing countries, and we know that having local knowledge or close contacts with the relevant authorities in those countries is of paramount importance.

Speaking at the summit, Gates said "the leaders and citizens here can reach out as partners to countries where they have special access and special kinship – areas where the rest of the world doesn't have the standing to intervene in the way that leaders here can do".

Indeed, Sheikh Mohammed and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation have already contributed greatly to the fight to give children around the world the vaccines they need. In 2011, they made a combined donation of US\$100m to buy and deliver the vaccines to children in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The importance of immunisation is clear for us all to see. Before the development of an effective vaccine, polio paralysed and killed up to half a million people every year. Thanks to the power of vaccines, we are now very close to declaring the world polio-free. It has been stamped out in India and the number of cases around the world has dropped dramatically.

Sadly this debilitating disease is still endemic in Nigeria, Afghanistan and Pakistan, so Gates has signed an agreement with Jeddah-based Islamic Development Bank (IDB) to gain Middle East support for his fight to ensure that the most vulnerable children living in hard to reach places also benefit from these life-saving vaccines in the hope of eradicating polio completely.

The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) has also signed an agreement with the IDB to vaccinate more than 400 million children in at least 29 countries. GAVI secures funding for vaccination programmes in the world's 73 poorest countries, and has started campaigns to vaccinate against illnesses such as rubella, HPV in girls, and pneumonia in countries like Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen.

Somalia, in particular, has benefited from a new five-in-one vaccine against

several potentially fatal childhood diseases including diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough. It has one of the highest child mortality rates in the world, with one in five dying before their fifth birthday. This heart-breaking statistic is not surprising given that Somalia also has one of the lowest immunisation rates in the world.

Unsurprisingly, calls for donations towards these vaccines were prevalent at the summit. Médecins Sans Frontières was one charity which addressed the alarming rise in the price of vaccines, something which threatens future vaccination programmes. However, with generous donations coming through from world leaders, charities, businesses and philanthropists, the dramatic reduction in diseases such as polio looks set to continue.

I have been fortunate enough to be in a position to help with the shipping costs of some of these vaccines to charities worldwide. Durbin is regularly offered in-date free stock for donation to charities and we pay the cost to ship these items overseas.

Durbin gets involved with so many different projects and they're all important to the company. But helping out in this kind of situation where people are so dependent on us is extremely rewarding. The admirable goals of charities in this sector deserve our unequivocal support. We all have the opportunity to provide it. **MCH**

Durbin PLC is a British company based in South Harrow, London. Established in 1963, the company specialises in supplying quality assured pharmaceuticals, medical equipment and consumable supplies to healthcare professionals and aid agencies in over 180 countries. As well as reacting rapidly to emergency situations, Durbin PLC responds to healthcare supply needs from local project level to national scale programmes. Web address: www.durbin.co.uk Email: L.morgan@durbin.co.uk