

# OXFORD REFUGEE HEALTH INITIATIVE: An innovative project training and supporting medical students to be health advocates for newly arrived refugees.

Report of activity from September 2017 – July 2018



Mina Fazel<sup>1</sup>, Aoife O'Higgins<sup>2</sup>, Sharon Dixon<sup>3</sup>, Brenda Kelly<sup>4</sup>, Margaret Reeves<sup>5</sup>, Monique Andersson<sup>4</sup> and medical students

1 Department of Psychiatry, University of Oxford  
2 University of Oxford, Department of Education  
3 Donnington Medical Partnership, Oxford  
4 Oxford University Hospitals NHS trust, Oxford  
3 Cowley Road Medical Practice, Oxford

Oxford Refugee Health Initiative helping newly arrived migrants navigate health systems

## Overview



Medical students receive training on issues relevant to working with refugees



Medical students are matched with refugees families and UASCs to help them better understand and navigate the UK health system

During this year, 14 medical students worked with 30 newly arrived refugees and another 25 students were trained

## The Role of ORHI

To address the combined needs of refugee families and medical students, the Oxford Refugee Health Initiative is an innovative project seeking:

- To develop and pilot an **ENHANCED PRIMARY CARE SERVICE** for refugee families and unaccompanied minors
- To support medical students in **DEVELOPING their CLINICAL SKILLS and CULTURAL COMPETENCIES**

## Background

### REFUGEE HEALTH NEEDS:

Refugees and asylum seekers frequently present with complex physical and mental health needs, including chronic disease and psychological trauma. Refugees need accessible and holistic services, able to respond their needs.

One GP told us: "Students working with families registered in my surgery have gathered health data, including medication and immunisation history, facilitated access to health services, accompanied families to appointments and advocated on their behalf to ensure they had access to an interpreter. Students have also supported families to find places of worship and recreational facilities; this has made a real difference to these families. Students' support has made my role easier and allowed me to work more effectively with refugee families."

### MEDICAL STUDENT NEEDS:

During medical training, communication skills and cultural sensitivity are highlighted as core competencies of a doctor, and practiced through workshops and role play scenarios. ORHI enhanced training provides additional information on safeguarding needs, working with these families outside traditional medical settings and the risks and benefits of this work.

Medical student: "Being involved in ORHI has meant working hands on with patients from different cultures who have difficulty accessing healthcare, something my standard medical curriculum doesn't offer. I have learnt how social and psychological factors have a tangible effect on health. I have also gained confidence in communicating with people from different backgrounds, including working with an interpreter.

## What has been done

We have developed **partnerships between newly settled refugee and asylum seeking families, their primary care doctors, volunteer medical students and third sector organisations in Oxford who work with refugees.**

We matched **14 students to six families** (10 adults and 15 children) and **one unaccompanied minor**. Most were Syrian but we also supported Iraqi and Sudanese families. All students are supervised by senior medical practitioners.

### Students have supported families with physical and mental health, by :

- Facilitating access to health services
- Accompanying families to appointments
- Advocating for families, e.g. for the use of an interpreter
- Following up with medical professionals where needed
- Making telephone for information, advocacy or follow up
- Explaining a medical condition, treatment and services
- Explaining repeat prescriptions and the role of pharmacies
- Documenting the family's full medical history for the GP
- Identifying gaps in immunisation history
- Promoting health literacy

### Students have also supported refugee integration by:

- Helping families understand letters
- Facilitating access to English language classes
- Supporting families with English language learning
- Identifying third sector organisations working with refugees
- Helping families develop effective relationship with schools
- Making referrals to Citizens' Advice Bureau
- Connecting families with refugee community organisations

### Finally, students have provided social support to families by:

- Identifying leisure facilities, for example football clubs
- Seeing families for social visits
- Helping families identify and access faith groups
- Visiting Oxford city with families

### Other outputs

We presented a poster at the Migration, Ethnicity, Race and Health World Congress in May 2018 in Edinburgh. [S Dixon, M Fazel, B Kelly, et al: The Oxford (UK) Refugee Health Initiative project: medical students supporting refugee families to provide healthcare advocacy and develop skills to care for vulnerable groups of patients, *Eur J Public Health*, 2018; 28,S1.1]

## Funding:

Funding for administrative support and additional interpretations costs has been provided by NHS England South (South Central) -Safeguarding Development monies

## Acknowledgements:

We thank NHS England, University of Oxford Medical School and medical student volunteers, the senior medical professionals supervising students and University of Oxford staff who support the project

## How we are supporting similar projects in the UK

We have focused on building a **scalable model of care** for vulnerable populations, which also **enhances the cultural competence of medical students**. This model could be adapted for other professionals and vulnerable groups.

Six medical schools, including one in France, have expressed interest in developing similar projects, which we are fully supporting.

We have created a website, with information about the project, to facilitate other groups adopting a similar model. Our resources are freely available. <https://orhi.org/>