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THE ST HELENA AMBASSADOR



Editorial

Hi, welcome to the St Helena Ambassador!

In this edition you can read about how St Helena supports the UK Health Security Agency's Laboratory Strengthening Programme and Prince Andrew School's Talent Show.

If you'd like to contribute a story to the St Helena Ambassador, please feel free to contact me on tel: 22470 or via email:

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St Helena supports UK Health Security Agency's Laboratory Strengthening Programme



When the COVID pandemic struck in 2020, it was evident that the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs), with their limited resources, weren't entirely prepared for such an event. There were no adequate diagnostic procedures to detect these types of viruses, and there was also various levels of expertise throughout the territories. The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) recognised this and started a programme of 'Laboratory Strengthening' in the UKOTs.

A team from the UKHSA visited St Helena post pandemic and was impressed by the facilities and the systems that the Health Services Directorate's Lab had in place as a small laboratory, and suggested they could use some of our ideas as a model for other small UKOT's.

Early in 2023, St Helena's Lab Manager, Geoffrey Benjamin, was approached by the UKHSA and asked to visit Montserrat, a Caribbean UKOT similar in size and population to St Helena. The assignment was to assist with putting appropriate new systems in place, provide training to the laboratory staff and streamline the antimicrobial testing regimes. Geoff also trained the staff on in-house culture plate production and made recommendations for some suitable equipment. Whilst there Geoff also set up and trained staff on the new Biofire analyser, which is a piece of equipment provided by UKHSA for the detection of a wide range of pathogens which the smaller laboratories were previously unable to detect.

In November 2023, Geoff was asked by the UKHSA to assist with a three-day workshop on antimicrobial resistance (AMR) which was hosted by Anguilla, another of the UKOTS in the Caribbean.

AMR happens when germs (like bacteria and fungi) develop the ability to defeat the drugs designed to kill them. AMR has emerged as one of the principal public health

problems of the 21st century. It threatens the effective prevention and treatment of an ever-increasing range of infections caused by bacteria, parasites, viruses and fungi which are no longer susceptible to the common medicines used to treat them.

Geoff explained: *"The problem of AMR is especially urgent regarding antibiotic resistance in bacteria. Over several decades, to varying degrees, bacteria causing common or severe infections have developed resistance to each new antibiotic coming to market. Faced with this reality, the need for action to avert a developing global crisis in health care is imperative."*

The workshop was attended by delegates from the Caribbean UKOTs. The aim of the workshop was to provide case presentations and discussion on clinical management, infection prevention, and surveillance surrounding antimicrobial resistance. There was also an opportunity for delegates to take part in practical sessions surrounding AMR detection and interpretation.

The delegates were a mixture of laboratory and clinical staff. The sessions were split into laboratory and non-laboratory, the laboratory sessions taking place in the laboratory at the Princess Alexandra Hospital and the non-laboratory presentations taking place at La Vue Boutique Hotel Conference Centre.

The practical sessions consisted of growing these 'superbugs', using suitable techniques to identify them, and standardising the antibiotic regimes to treat them in order to reduce the chance of escalating the resistance problem.

The feedback was positive from all delegates and they were able to form a new network with their neighbouring islands. There is now a WhatsApp group where the various labs discuss and share information to improve expertise in this field.

Geoff concluded: *"I was privileged to be asked by UKHSA to assist with conducting these training sessions, and I thoroughly enjoyed the experience of meeting and getting to know some of our Medical Scientists in the UKOT's. I also learned a lot about the Caribbean Islands. I would like to thank the UKHSA for giving me the opportunity, and SHG Health Directorate for allowing me the time out to carry out these training sessions."*



Prince Andrew School hosts Talent Show



Prince Andrew School (PAS) held a Talent Show at the school's hall on Monday, 11 December 2023.

Barbara Osborne, Acting Head Teacher of PAS, opened the evening by welcoming members of the public and guests, including HE Governor Nigel Phillips CBE, accompanied by Mrs Phillips. Barbara explained that the students were nervous as most of them had not performed in front of a large crowd and so were making their debut performances, but encouraged the audience to give the students their full support and encouragement.

The band 'New Generation' performed six songs and the school's Enrichment Programme choir 'the Voice' sang two songs. There were dance performances and solo performances, as well as an instrumental song performed on the keyboard. The Year 9 students performed a scene from Shakespeare which they learned about during their English lessons. The audience was also invited to sing along to two Christmas carols.

Member of the Prince Andrew School PTA, Elizabeth Clingham hosted the evening and introduced the acts. Elizabeth said:

"Tonight is an opportunity to celebrate Prince Andrew School and most importantly celebrated the students of Prince Andrew School and the support they get from their teachers. Every act tonight has been done so voluntarily. No School time has been put in to practice for what have been presented this evening. The time that has been committed has been the student's lunchtimes, afternoon sessions and extra curriculum activities, so it's nice to have an event that is student lead, supported by the teachers, and not the opposite way around."

Although the entrance for this event was free, money was generously donated by the public to put towards the school's fund for music education.

Acting Head Teacher, Barbara Osborne, concluded:

"I would like to say a huge thank you to all who attended the evening to support the students who did themselves and the school proud. I am so proud of you all, each of you have such talent so continue to shine as this is just the start of a new beginning. Enjoy your holidays and stay safe."

