

Role Profile for Volunteer Doctors at MRC Unit The Gambia.

Established in 1947, the MRC Unit The Gambia is one of 52 research units supported by the UK Medical Research Council. The Unit in The Gambia represent the UK's major public investment in medical research in developing countries. Its vision is leading scientific research to save lives and improve health across the developing world. Its aim is to improve the health of the people in low-income countries by achieving excellence in research, training and healthcare. The Unit works closely with the Ministry of Health in the Gambia.

The MRC Unit The Gambia has an international reputation for ground-breaking research into some of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in the tropics. Achievements include a large trial showing the efficacy of *Haemophilus influenzae* type B vaccine in The Gambia and the subsequent near elimination of the disease, pioneering studies of the impact of insecticide treated bed nets as a preventive measure against malaria leading up to their worldwide use, studies demonstrating the impact of conjugate pneumococcal vaccines on pneumonia and child mortality and the demonstration of a dramatic reduction in the carriage of Hepatitis B in The Gambia due to the effects of vaccination.

To reflect changes in national and global health priorities and new international funding opportunities, its research portfolio has been reorganised under three themes: Disease Control and Elimination, Nutrition and Vaccines & Immunity. These themes have been selected to target national health needs, to reinforce sub-regional and international links and to address some of the major current priorities in the Millennium Development Global Health Goals.

The Unit has a varied staff complement including international and West African appointments from some 24 countries, as well as many visiting researchers. The main field station is in Fajara on the coast and comprises laboratories, a hospital, computer centre, offices, workshops, residential accommodation, etc. The laboratories are spacious and well equipped with P3 and other facilities for cell and viral culture, cellular immunology, molecular biology, genotyping and HLA typing. There are field stations upcountry – Basse and Keneba and a field site (Walikunda) – each in a different ecological setting providing varied research opportunities.

MRCG research typically combines field epidemiology, clinical and laboratory based research. All research projects within the unit are approved by the Scientific Co-ordinating Committee and Joint Gambia Government/MRCG Ethics Committee.

The Clinical Services Department is responsible for providing medical care to staff, study participants and the general public.

In Fajara, the general public access services via the Gate clinic, where about 155 patients are seen daily from Monday to Thursday, and 80 on Fridays. They are mainly patients with minor complaints who are treated by the enrolled nurses under the supervision of the nursing sister. The Outpatient department (OPD) provides care for patients referred from the Gate clinic as well as from the private sector and other hospitals, embassy clinics and health centres. About 100 patients are seen each day – mainly adult and pediatric medical cases. The staff clinic (providing primary health care to MRC staff and their immediate family) runs alongside the OPD. The ward has 42 beds and provides in-patient care for patients admitted through the OPD. There are specialist clinics for liver disease and TB. There are no surgical or obstetric facilities at Fajara. Patients with tropical diseases such as severe malnutrition and malaria are seen regularly but the wards are not as busy as those of some government or mission hospitals in Africa where greater clinical experience can be obtained. However, at Fajara, there are good laboratory facilities for full investigation of patients admitted under the care of the MRC and in both Fajara and Keneba, junior doctors are provided with more supervision and support.

The field station in Keneba runs a primary care service for the local population. The outpatient department sees 100 – 200 patients a day, with a wide variety of chronic and acute problems. The maternity department runs an antenatal clinic, conducts deliveries and provides family planning and post natal care. There is a supplementary feeding centre for malnourished children, which can have up to 12 children at a time during the rainy season, but is often very quiet at other times. There are only two inpatient beds for short admissions, and most acutely ill patients are referred to larger centres.

More limited clinical services are provided in Basse for staff .

CSD in Fajara is staffed by 3 consultants (a family physician, a paediatrician and an adult physician), 3 medical officers and a general practitioner responsible for staff healthcare. Research clinicians also contribute their time to the outpatient clinic and to the on-call rota.

We are seeking medical volunteers who are interested in gaining experience of work in a low resource setting, where they can be supervised and supported. We would like to offer placements of 4 to 6 months each. During this time, doctors will work alongside the employed medical officers and under the supervision of the consultants. They would be placed on the ward and in the outpatient clinic depending on their level of prior experience. They would be encouraged to take part in the department's CPD activities and to undertake a clinical audit or help to develop guidelines for the department. They could use their time in the unit to network with research staff and may be able to extend their stay by moving into a research setting. It may be possible to visit one of the field stations for a short period.

We are able to offer free accommodation on site for this period and will be able to provide flights for the initial arrival and return journeys.