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Challenging Tuberculosis: The Public Diplomacy of KNCV ^[1]

Exchanges are arguably the most important tool of public diplomacy. Ambassador Richard Le Baron wrote that “...exchanges—bringing foreigners to the United States and sending Americans abroad—are the most effective tools in actually building constructive views of each other’s societies.” Global health-focused public diplomacy is no different.

One organization that incorporates the exchange of knowledge and sharing of experiences into its work is the KNCV Tuberculosis Foundation. Based in the Hague, KNCV is a world-renowned center of expertise for tuberculosis (TB) care and prevention. Its mission is to eradicate TB through the development and implementation of effective, efficient and sustainable treatment strategies. Every year, KNCV leads an advanced course in clinical tuberculosis that enables physicians and other health professionals to gain the latest information on the management of TB. Perhaps more importantly, the course provides participants and faculty the opportunity to network and develop working relationships with other global health professionals.

KNCV has also hosted health professionals who come to the organization’s headquarters in the Hague to learn more about TB care and prevention. Greek physician Dr. Katerina Manika recently described the six weeks she spent in the Netherlands, learning about the Dutch response to TB. Dr. Manika was surprised to learn about the strong role of Dutch non-governmental organizations, such as KNCV, in the global response to TB. She characterized her participation in this exchange as extremely informative and was grateful for the active, hands-on experiences she had.

KNCV has successfully used its experiences in the field of TB to effect change at the policy level and achieve positive outcomes to international global health meetings.

Aside from providing information about incoming exchanges, KNCV’s blog describes the experiences of KNCV staff traveling to other countries as well. KNCV Young Professional Fellow Nick Blok explained how much he learned during a trip to Viet Nam, where he learned about the country’s success in creating a large network of health workers and volunteers to identify pediatric TB patients and the challenges associated with the roll-out of this new program.

The experiences of KNCV staff and partners enable the organization to advocate for sound TB policies at global fora, including the annual World Conference on Lung Health and the World Health Assembly. Because the global health landscape is crowded with a “plethora of players,” it can sometimes be difficult to attract sufficient attention to health issues like TB, which are often wrongly perceived to be diseases of the past. KNCV has successfully used its

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In addition to its participation in key international meetings and conferences, KNCV also leads and manages the Challenge TB project. With support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and in collaboration with other global health organizations, KNCV is implementing the Challenge TB project in 22 countries in three continents. Challenge TB's objective is to help countries to move towards universal access through a patient-centered approach that identifies and addresses the needs of all patients including women and children. Through these activities and others, KNCV is working towards its goal of a world without TB.

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