

Preparing for future pandemics

Thank you Sir Patrick – and good morning everyone.

I think this is an incredibly important meeting and an incredibly important process and I'm very grateful to everyone for their time.

It was Melinda Gates – who will close this conference tomorrow – who once said:

Goals are only wishes, unless you have a plan.

And so at the UN last September, the Prime Minister set out a plan: the Five Point Plan to Prevent Future Pandemics.

At its heart is the drive to get better and quicker at developing and deploying what we might need in a future crisis, and especially the life-saving vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics. But not limited to those things.

And as hard as it might be to focus on a future crisis while we're still facing down COVID-19, the WHO estimates we face a pandemic threat every 5 years.

So we must be better prepared. And we must start that process now.

And if you think about it, the structures we've put in place, from the ACT-Accelerator to COVAX, we're in a stronger place than we were and we've been stronger when we've worked in partnership.

And there's a couple of important points that I think are critical to what this partnership means.

Firstly, I think it's very important we recognise that whether it's public or private, or from academia or industry, we must draw on expertise and resources wherever we find them, and we're more than the sum of our parts.

And that is at the core of what this Pandemic Preparedness Partnership is all about. And looking at the part that all of us can play in improving and streamlining vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics, so we're better prepared for future pandemics.

Let me turn for a moment to the role of the G7. And I can see Sir Patrick sitting in front of the G7 logo there.

The UK as President of the G7 will be ensuring that we use that institution to drive forward the project that we call building back better, and we're determined to make it count.

I'm so grateful to our G7 colleagues joining us today.

I'm sure you agree: at a time like this, the G7 can't be anything but ambitious.

And our G7 health track reflects that ambition. We want health security for all, working on international leadership on clinical trials, action on antimicrobial resistance, and to embrace the vast opportunities in digital health we've seen come to the fore over the last year.

And the PPP can be instrumental in this agenda – especially in those first 2 strands: global health security and clinical trials.

And there really is no better place to start than the G7.

The reason we use the G7 is that that group represents two thirds of the global pharmaceutical market, the majority of the world's genomic capability, a huge proportion of global research and development, and it leads the world in life sciences and clinical trials.

So at our G7 meetings this summer, both at the health track and then the leaders, I want us to declare to the world how we can take this forward, how we can make vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics available and accessible in the vast quantities that we're going to need to make the world safer.

And responding to the call that has already been made to slash the time that's need to develop and deploy vaccines by two thirds to just 100 days – and being equally ambitious about ensuring high-quality and effective therapeutics and diagnostics are available quickly after a new disease threat is identified.

That's the goal. But it remains just a wish, unless we plan.

So I'm incredibly grateful to Sir Patrick and our 6 expert leads, for the work they're going to do shaping advice and developing policy recommendations across the 3 workstreams. And if I just briefly touch on the 3.

First, to Sir Andrew Witty and Sir John Bell, who will look at how we can accelerate research and development for new vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics and the technologies that are going to help us manufacture and deploy them across the globe.

And in that mission, we need look no further than organisations like CEPI to see what is possible when we embrace new and dynamic types of partnership.

CEPI's mission – to find new vaccines for a safer world – is one the UK is firmly behind.

Because vaccines of course are one of the most powerful tools we have.

The UK will continue to support CEPI, and today I'm pleased to confirm a further £16 million investment.

The funds are there to support CEPI's work to boost manufacturing capacity around the world, all with the goal of making sure no one is left behind and

taking us ever closer to the model of responsiveness that we need to prevent future pandemics.

And that sort of model is one where we get the rapid adaption of vaccines to new diseases or new variants – within that 100-day goal – and deployment where they're needed.

Beyond vaccines, it is also imperative that we significantly enhance our speed of response to pick up new technologies, and in particular I want to mention the supply of novel antiviral treatments which later today the Prime Minister will be setting out the details of how we will be driving forward the deployment and development of antivirals here in the UK.

A second team I want to give a shout out to and touch on is the work that Dame Anne Johnson and Professor Martin Landray are going to be doing on how we can improve clinical trials and data sharing.

For me the pandemic has shown beyond measure the value of robust clinical trials. And, critically, the value of sticking with the clinical trial even when there is this incredible imperative to get treatments out fast.

Finding what works, and, crucially, ruling out what doesn't work. I'm sure all of us in our heads can think of treatments that have been trumpeted, sometimes from the highest office, as solutions, but clinical trials are the answer as we know to finding out what works.

But we've got to get quicker. And if trials aren't working to shared standards across borders, we risk losing precious time – and precious ingenuity.

I've been struck by the fact that if clinical trials aren't designed right with set standards at the start, then the data within them is not interoperable or not easily interoperable and therefore it takes longer to get a robust signal. This is something we can and must fix.

Faced with another pandemic, those aren't risks any of us should be prepared to take.

We've got to hold onto these precious commodities – ingenuity and time – and use data and insights as fast as possible flowing freely across borders so the whole world can benefit.

Here in the UK, the MHRA worked really hard to overcome some of the obstacles within the structure of clinical trials taking place in different jurisdictions.

And that was one of the reasons we were able to license vaccines here in the UK faster than anywhere else in the UK, because of the flexibility yet robustness shown by the MHRA.

And making sure that in future we have clinical trials that can get the power of all of the data used everywhere in the world is incredibly important. It requires set standards that we agree on in principle before those trials are

structured.

I know it's possible. But it will take focus and it will take leadership – and that's what the G7 can provide.

And then the third point I want to briefly touch on is, of course, the money.

I'm incredibly grateful to Baroness Minouche Shafik and Lord Jim O'Neill, who are working, along with the finance ministers' track, on sustainable finance.

Now let's face it, the pandemic has been painfully expensive, not just in how much we've had to spend, but the hit to our economies too.

Confronted with the same level of preparedness, we would risk being in the same boat.

But in future, when we're better prepared, we'll be able to do it differently and do it better – with more targeted, more inventive and more sustainable financing initiatives.

And here, crucially, it is absolutely vital that in peacetime, when there is not a pandemic on the horizon, we can bring in the financing that can ensure we stay prepared.

So today is a fantastic chance to draw on the unmatched experience of this incredible group of people and put forward some big, bold ideas.

Ideas that drive the plan that we're working towards putting before G7 leaders in June and, ultimately, the plan that we'll then put before the whole world.

We've got to bring everyone with us as much as is possible on this vital mission and with the plan that we will develop through this team, with our plan – with your plan – I know that we can make it.

So thank you very much for what you're going to do and for the work that you're doing in putting these plans in place and then to turn these plans into actions.

It's incredibly important and the work starts now.