

Press release: Northern healthcare firms target new opportunities in Africa

Businesses including Yorkshire's Sunflower Medical and Medasil were amongst 16 firms from the north that travelled to trade fair Africa Health 2019 in South Africa as part of a mission organised by DIT and Medilink UK, the UK's largest association of Life Sciences and Medical Technology companies.

This comes as a new analysis of HMRC data by DIT found that exports of UK medical equipment reached a record high of £1.8 billion in 2018, up by 6% on 2017.

The mission, which saw the delivery of a British pavilion at the exhibition, provided an unrivalled opportunity for the businesses to meet potential new buyers and learn more about overcoming barriers and breaking into new markets in Africa. The businesses were accompanied by life sciences sector specialists from DIT in the north of England.

Bradford's Sunflower Medical, which manufactures contemporary functional furniture for medical use, has experienced growing demand from several African markets over recent years, and has already supplied its medical furniture into Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Morocco and Nigeria.

Sunflower Medical's Export Sales Manager Paul Hampton believes there are still significant opportunities for expansion with new healthcare projects across the continent.

He said:

We're very conscious of the rapidly growing opportunities in African markets, which is why we made the decision to return to Africa Health this year. It's great that DIT and Medilink host these missions, as being on the ground at these events is invaluable to companies like ours".

This year's trip proved incredibly fruitful, with an encouraging quantity and quality of sales leads generated. Just over half of sales leads over the three days came from the South African market, with interest also coming from companies looking to represent Sunflower Medical in Kenya, Ghana and Malawi.

Leeds based Medasil, which has been making devices for a range of medical applications since 1974, was also in attendance on the mission.

Medasil's Christine Casey commented:

While Medasil doesn't currently export to African markets, we're keen to venture into new areas of opportunity, which is why we registered for the DIT mission to Africa Health.

We were hugely encouraged by what we saw, and we gained some valuable insights into the opportunities the continent holds. Our exhibit was received very positively and we have returned to the UK with genuine excitement about the opportunities for expansion into the African continent".

Strengthening the UK's partnership with African nations is a key element of the UK Government's vision for Global Britain.

Last year the Department for International Trade appointed its first HM Trade Commissioner for Africa, Emma Wade-Smith OBE, who is working closely with HM Ambassadors, High Commissioners and the wider diplomatic network to promote UK trade and prosperity in the region.

Commenting on the recent mission, HM Trade Commissioner for Africa, Emma Wade-Smith OBE said:

I'm delighted to see Northern Powerhouse businesses exploring the fast-growing opportunities that African markets have to offer.

I've seen for myself how the UK's expertise in the healthcare sector is the envy of many countries around the world. Coupled with our manufacturing heritage and leading innovation, I have every confidence that British businesses operating in this space will experience strong demand for their products and services over the years ahead.