

# **A Solid B.A.S.E. to Innovation within the NHS: A New Approach to Social Sustainability**

**Tamsin Holland Brown<sup>a</sup>**

**<sup>a</sup>Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust and NHS England Clinical Entrepreneur Programme, UK**

## **ABSTRACT**

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The NHS (National Health Service) Clinical Entrepreneur Programme (CEP) is the world's largest workforce development programme which allows NHS workers to pursue healthcare innovations. The NHS staff learn to successfully develop and spread innovative solutions to the challenges facing the NHS. Social responsibility is the positive and additional contribution of an innovation/company to society, their ecosystem and community. Many companies know the benefits of a socially responsible approach (customer engagement, team purpose, enhancing reputation, access to contracts requiring adherence to the Social Value Act or the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals) but the challenge has always been a lack of accountability for innovators or businesses in this area.

The UK's National NHS England Clinical Entrepreneur Programme is one of the largest healthcare innovation programmes in the world. Every year, approximately 150 clinicians with an idea or innovation to improve healthcare are accepted onto the programme with an idea or innovation to improve healthcare. There is a new approach within the Clinical Entrepreneur Programme which aims to embed a social purpose into all innovations, using a new principle called B.A.S.E. (thus named because it aims for entrepreneurs to use it as a base for building their innovations). This is a novel approach. Innovation in healthcare needs a socially responsible BASE to an idea or business, which considers the Benefit to society, Advocacy and Accountability, Sustainability and Social Purpose and Ethical leadership by Empowering and Enabling others.

The BASE approach was trailed within the NHS England Clinical Entrepreneur Programme. Firstly, BASE principles were taught face-to-face and on-line. Secondly, the programme itself modelled a socially responsible BASE in its own operational activities. Thirdly, clinical entrepreneurs were able to work through a form and able to submit their social purpose, socially sustainable activities and supply chain aims, which allowed case examples to be highlighted. The BASE programme is a simple, cost-effective approach to engage, improve and lightly monitor socially responsible activities within a health workforce innovation program.

## **KEYWORDS**

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**Social purpose, value, clinical, entrepreneurship, NHS, National Health Service**

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## 1. Introduction

Digital health solutions are the fastest growing area of health innovation.<sup>1</sup> Social responsibility is the positive and additional contribution of an innovation/company to society, their ecosystem and community. Many companies know the benefits of a socially responsible approach, including customer engagement, team purpose, enhancing reputation, access to contracts requiring adherence to the Social Value Act or UN Sustainable Development Goals. However, the challenge for a socially responsible approach has always been a lack of monitoring or accountability for innovators or businesses in this area.<sup>2</sup> Businesses, new innovations and their supply chains can have a major impact on society and surrounding ecosystems. Child labor, toxic waste and below-living wages have been discovered in supply chains to NHS organizations.<sup>3</sup> The biggest problem being that businesses are not accountable to anyone for their actions on society, human rights and ecosystems. There is a need for a culture of integrity, transparency, honesty as well as a dedicated commitment to ethical, fair and socially sustainable development: to incorporate socially responsible values and to be not only accountable for the impact on society but to provide additional benefits.

Social responsibility is beneficial to innovations and businesses, often providing a competitive and reputational advantage; strengthening a product or company's brand and image; engaging the company actively within a community or with potential customers; engaging and retaining workers in the team/company by adding further vision and purpose; providing access to grants and rebates; attracting investors; providing access to government contracts aligned with social value (figure 1) and often providing a higher economic return.<sup>4</sup> The largest healthcare workforce Clinical Entrepreneur Programme (CEP) is run by National Health Service (NHS) England's Accelerated Access Collaborative (AAC) and supports medical health professionals to remain in their NHS jobs whilst enabling them to seed and grow innovative ideas as Clinical Entrepreneurs (CE) to ultimately benefit the NHS (<https://nhscep.com/>). The CEP became one of the first NHS Innovation programmes to expect entrepreneurs to be accountable for a socially responsible approach and educate and enable CE's to monitor and highlight social value within their innovation journey.

Deliberately avoiding debated and potentially outdated terminology, the terms 'corporate social responsibility' and 'giving back' were replaced by calling the new proposal the social value BASE, which looked at Benefits, Advocacy, Sustainability and Ethical approach.

Innovation in digital healthcare needs a socially responsible BASE, which considers the Benefit to society, Advocacy for and accountability to patient groups or communities, Social purpose including Sustainability across the supply chain and Ethical leadership by Empowering, Educating and Enabling others. The BASE approach was trailed within the NHS England Clinical Entrepreneur Programme. Firstly, BASE principles were taught face-to-face and on-line. Secondly, the programme itself modelled a socially responsible BASE to its own activities. Thirdly, participants were able to share their BASE achievements and good case examples were highlighted.

Monitoring socially responsible activities and holding innovators, entrepreneurs or businesses accountable for their actions has always been challenging.<sup>2</sup> This paper considers simple, celebratory and positive activities referred to as a 'BASE approach', aiming to embed values and a social purpose early, increasing socially responsible activities and highlighting cases to learn from excellence.



Figure 1: The UK Government website provides information about the Social Value Act.

## 2. Methodology

The BASE approach was trailed within cohort six of the NHS England National Clinical Entrepreneur programme. Prior to the start of the year's programme, the new cohort of Clinical Entrepreneurs starting the year programme were surveyed. They were asked to rate their confidence on a scale of 1–10 where 1 was 'I don't know' and 10 was 'very confident' regarding the following issues:

- 1) How confident do you feel about knowing how to build social accountability into your plans for your innovation?
- 2) How confident are you about the next steps you can take to be socially responsible?
- 3) How confident are you that your innovation can boast concrete examples, awards or certificates related to social accountability?

The socially responsible BASE values were then taught face-to-face at the education events, with additional resources made available on the programme's website. The programme itself also modelled a socially responsible BASE to its own activities by adding BENEFIT by collaborating and offering opportunities and teaching individuals identified through a large UK charity and by forming a partnership with university technical colleges to support students; ADVOCATING for diversity within innovation; being ACCOUNTABLE for the approach by sampling innovations, collecting feedback and reporting back to the board; ADDING well-being activities to each programme meeting for CEs, as well as encouraging a buddy system for participants to support the well-being of each other; SOCIAL PURPOSE was added to strategic objectives and key principles and this was committed to by the CEP board; EMPOWERING AND ENABLING others by allowing some clinical entrepreneurs to step up as clinical leads on the programme in areas such as environmental sustainability, well-being and supporting social enterprise.

Additionally, the programme taught the BASE principles (of additional Benefit, Advocacy & Accountability, Sustainability and Ethical leadership by Empowering and Enabling others) and encouraged participants to work towards measuring and introducing accountability.



Figure 2. Information from the Clinical Entrepreneur Programme (CEP) website. Image by kind permission from www.nhscep.com.

### 3. Results

Confidence levels regarding social responsibility were low amongst CEs at the start of the programme. Confidence (as rated on a scale of 1–10 where 1 was ‘I don’t know’ and 10 was ‘very confident’) amongst the Clinical Entrepreneurs regarding:

1) How confident do you feel about knowing how to build social accountability into your plans for your innovation?

The average (mean) answer was 4.1 (n=69)

2) How confident are you about the next steps you can take to be socially responsible

Average (mean) answer 4.2

3) How confident are you that your innovation can boast concrete examples, awards or certificates related to social accountability?

Average (mean) answer 3.6

With low confidence in this area of the programme, the CEP then introduced the social value B.A.S.E. approach. The 150 CEs making up the cohort of NHS England Clinical Entrepreneurs were introduced to the B.A.S.E. approach by attending education events throughout the year, accessing the website and/or submitting their BASE achievements.

Confidence levels sampled (n=12) near the end of the year showed the following improvements:

Building social accountability into plans for innovation: 8.8.

Confidence about next steps to be socially responsible: 8.4.

Examples of social innovation: 6.0.

#### *The impact of the programme itself modelling BASE principles*

The programme aligned with NHS England priorities **5** and UN sustainability goals **6**. The programme partnered with entrepreneurs identified through Crisis ([www.crisis.org.uk](http://www.crisis.org.uk)), a homeless charity, which awards grants to those applying for capital to set up and start their own business. The CE programme was able to offer these entrepreneurs access to the education and learning events, mentoring and networking

opportunities. Four Crisis Entrepreneurs joined the cohort of Clinical Entrepreneurs. Outcomes showed that two of the Crisis Entrepreneurs developed confidence in business skills and both secured business directly through the network. The hybrid CEP events (education and learning events all offered online and face to face) suited the Crisis Entrepreneurs for both access and decreasing anxiety around face-to-face events initially. Due to the success of this programme, the partnership has continued and further partnerships have been explored.

### ***Education about social enterprise***

Social enterprise was taught throughout the year by an assigned clinical lead who had founded 'Generation Medics' and been part of the Clinical Entrepreneur Programme since it was founded. Generation Medics provides up-to-date information, unbiased advice, support, information, and networks to empower and inspire people from all communities to fulfil their potential, by making medical and health-care careers accessible to everyone. The founder of Generation Medics provided 1-to-1 support sessions, specific events and educational talks regarding social enterprises to other clinical entrepreneurs. This led to CE's understanding of how social enterprises are set up, created and maintained. Some CEs were inspired to volunteer their time to support other social enterprises.



Generation Medics is a multi-award-winning social enterprise founded by NHS Doctors in Oxford.

We're on a mission to support current and future healthcare professionals from **all backgrounds** to succeed in their careers.

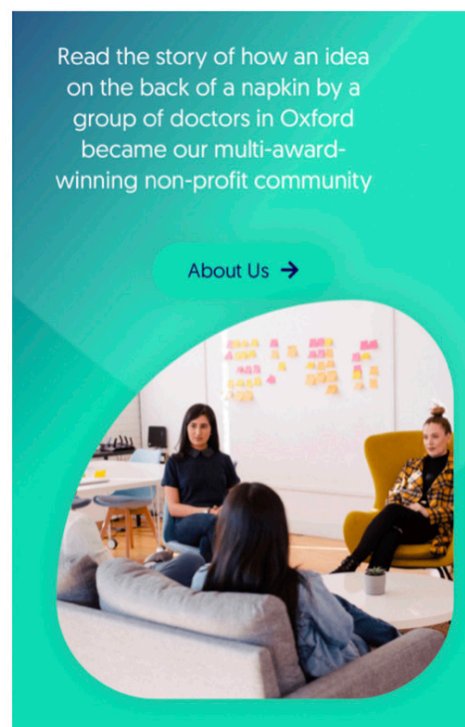


Figure 3: One of the first cohort of Clinical Entrepreneurs, running Generation Medics (a social enterprise) modelled and educated clinical entrepreneurs about social enterprises. Image reproduced by kind permission from [www.generationmedics.org.uk](http://www.generationmedics.org.uk).

### ***Social impact of entrepreneurship within underrepresented groups***

Of the entrepreneurs highlighted as succeeding at all 4 BASE principles (n=12), the majority (n= 9) identified themselves as part of an underrepresented ethnic group. They were committed not just to their innovation to succeed but to provide opportunities for others in underrepresented groups or groups with larger health inequalities. Addressing healthcare inequalities is currently a NHS priority.



### ***Adding Learning from Excellence***

Learning from Excellence 7 is a system of capturing excellent practice in healthcare and learning from it. Positive feedback within an organization is captured with thank-you cards or emails to staff via a system that records and analyses the content. Themes can be explored and system changes made to increase excellence in healthcare. This system was introduced into the CEP and resulted in the emergence of a theme surrounding how much the cohort valued and learnt from each other and the health innovation partners on the programme. This system of gratitude also recognized the value of an overlapping programme called HIPP (Health Innovation Placement Pilot) which was valued by many of the CEs for the insights, perspectives and problem solving that they brought to conversations.

### ***Planned follow up to determine the medium to long-term impact of BASE***

Monitoring the long-term success of social responsibility initiatives ensures that intended outcomes are achieved and that there is evidence of a positive impact. This involves tracking key performance indicators, such as the number of people reached, the level of engagement and participation, and the amount of resources invested. It also involves assessing the effectiveness of the initiatives in achieving their objectives, as well as the unintended consequences that may arise. Feedback from stakeholders, including patient groups, health-care staff, and the community, can also provide valuable insights into the impact of the CEP social responsibility initiatives. The CEP showcases patient feedback at the end of the year. By monitoring the long-term success of social responsibility initiatives, the CEP expects entrepreneurs to continuously improve, demonstrate their commitment to responsible business practices, and enhance their reputation as socially responsible companies.

## **4. Conclusion**

The Clinical Entrepreneur Programme is a work force development programme for NHS workers. Working within the NHS, already many clinical entrepreneurs have examples of adding social value and additional benefit to local patient groups, communities and networks. Those working with or identifying with under-represented groups engaged in the most examples of social value within their business or innovation. The BASE programme was a simple, cost-effective way to engage CEs and improve their confidence in delivering their innovation in a socially responsible way. This improves their chances of aligning their innovation with the Social Value Act, government contracts, certain grants or investors and strengthening their brand, team and purpose.

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### **Conflict of interest statement**

Dr T Holland Brown works as co-clinical lead for the NHS England Clinical Entrepreneur Programme as well as working as a pediatrician in Cambridge for Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust. She does consultancy work (paid) for ORCHA (Organisation for the Review of Care and Health Apps) and is founder of Hear Glue Ear.

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