

## Profile

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# ECHO International Health Services

Established in 1966, ECHO International Health Services is a United Kingdom-based charity which pioneered the concept of supplying quality assured pharmaceutical, medical and health care products to the developing world at low cost. Operating purely for the benefit of non-commercial health providers, ECHO's organizational objectives are to help bring about improved access to quality care for all, and also to provide a rapid response capacity for appropriate medical supply to emergency situations. ECHO's database of customers, beneficiaries and partners includes over 5,000 aid agencies, charities, Mission health facilities, universities, governments and others in more than 130 countries.

ECHO is also actively engaged in development and dissemination of good practice guidelines in health care management, in collaboration with the World Health Organization, the Pharmaceutical Advisory Group of the World Council of Churches, the UK non-governmental organization AIDS Consortium and others.

The basic principles underpinning ECHO's work are quality, appropriateness, sustainability and affordability of supplies backed up by expert advice, support and information. The ECHO team not only includes technical, biomedical and health specialists, but also staff with extensive experience of working in the field. Thus the organization is able to assist aid agencies, charity hospitals and others based on a high degree of understanding of their needs and requirements at all levels.

The core of ECHO's operation is the provision, on a not-for-profit basis, of pharmaceuticals, consumables, medical equipment, laboratory and public health supplies to those implementing free or low cost health care around the world, and to organizations responding to humanitarian emergencies. Over 2,000 products are kept in stock at ECHO's Coulsdon facility, including almost 400 generic drugs recommended in the World Health Organization model list of essential drugs. ECHO's extensive contacts and expertise mean that several thousand further items can be sourced reliably on request.

The organization also has an active Biomedical Engineering Department (Bmed), which specialized in the reconditioning of some 250 different items of equipment. Second-hand equipment is obtained from NHS Trusts, private hospitals, clinics and auctions. ECHO is particularly grateful for the generous donations of equipment it receives. The Bmed team repairs, refurbishes and fully tests these items, and they are then offered at a fraction of the cost of new equipment to those who need them most. Sustainability being of paramount importance, spare parts support, manuals and long warranties are all part of the package.

The majority of ECHO's work is carried out on a self-financing basis, but there are also a number of crucial areas where the organization relies heavily on the support of donors for its activities. These fall into several categories, ranging from free or subsidized consultancy and training in areas such as equipment maintenance and rational medical procurement practice to the development of useful resource materials for free distribution overseas, grants for essential medical supplies to emergency situations, subsidy projects for HIV blood screening tests (for blood transfusion) and malaria nets and many more.

Among the current initiatives for which ECHO is looking for partners and backers is a plan to strengthen independent quality control of all the products it supplies. Batch testing of products and inspections of manufacturing facilities are a necessary element of ECHO's commitment to quality but this activity is also increasingly expensive. In order to avoid having to pass the costs on to beneficiaries in the field, ECHO is currently appealing for funds and/or for technical assistance from qualified and recognized bodies to help it carry out increasing amounts of product testing and manufacturer inspections.

ECHO's motto states that we are "committed to quality health care in a changing world". With no field-based staff of our own, our approach has been to work in partnership with health practitioners on the ground, developing services which use our expertise to meet their needs, facilitate their work and assist them with employing their often limited resources in a cost effective way. The provision of appropriate, quality assured pharmaceuticals and equipment at low cost, subsidized or in some cases free, is at the centre of this operation.

Generous help from donors has also allowed us to develop a whole range of important "value adding" services over the years, which would be unaffordable to most of our beneficiaries through the commercial sector, but are often greatly needed. From consultancy to training, advisory services to resource development, ECHO can offer its partners a broad spectrum of assistance and support which goes beyond the simple provision of supplies, and which can really make a difference to the quality of health care available to some of the most disadvantaged populations on earth.

For further information please contact:

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