

University of Birmingham press release

RELEASE DATE: THURSDAY 26TH AUGUST 2021

UNILAG Coordinates Nigerian Network Involvement in Global COVID-19 Surgery Study with Guinness World Record

A study led by University of Birmingham and Edinburgh experts, in conjunction with researchers from the University of Lagos and other leading universities in Nigeria, has been awarded the [Guinness World Records title](#) for the world's largest scientific collaboration - involving over 140,000 patients in 116 countries.

The record for ***'Most authors on a single peer-reviewed academic paper'*** is now held by the Universities of Birmingham and Edinburgh after 15,025 scientists around the globe including researchers from the University of Lagos, contributed to major research into the impact of COVID-19 on surgical patients.

Funded by the NIHR, the researchers concluded that patients waiting for elective surgery should be treated as a vulnerable group and access COVID-19 vaccines ahead of the general population – potentially helping to avoid thousands of post-operative deaths linked to the virus.

This could be particularly important for Low- and Middle-income Countries (LMICs) such as Nigeria, where access to vaccination remains limited and mitigation measures like nasal swab screening and COVID-free surgical pathways to reduce the risk of virus-related complications are not available for many patients.

Overall, the scientists which included researchers from the University of Lagos coordinated by Professor Adesoji Ademuyiwa, Hub Director (NIHR Lagos Hub), and other researchers from Lagos State University, University of Ibadan, University of Ilorin, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, University of Abuja, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, University of Port Harcourt, Aminu Kano University, and others, estimated that global prioritisation of pre-operative vaccination for elective patients could prevent an additional 58,687 COVID-19-related deaths in one year.

The [COVIDSurg Collaborative](#) international team of researchers published its findings in *BJS*, Europe's leading surgical journal, after studying data from 1,667 hospitals in countries including Australia, Brazil, China, India, Nigeria, UAE, UK and USA.

Study co-lead author Mr Aneel Bhangu, a surgeon from the University of Birmingham, commented: *"Being awarded the Guinness World Records title for the world's largest scientific collaboration highlights the scale of our global partnership, which aims to contribute to our understanding of COVID-19 and help to save as many lives as possible around the world."*

“It marks the commitment and hard work of thousands of medical colleagues around the world to understand the changes that are needed in how surgery must be delivered if we are to beat the virus and reduce its impact on surgical patients.”

The NIHR Global Surgery Unit Nigeria Lead, Professor Adesoji Ademuyiwa of the University of Lagos, states that *“The age of building silos is over. We must break down the silos and build bridges. Collaboration in medical research is key and will help achieve within a short time what it will take years to achieve if one goes alone. This award goes to support the proverb that says “if you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go with others”. This collaboration has achieved a tremendous impact by giving guidance to policy makers in care of surgical patients.”*

“The success of the Collaborative has been a great encouragement to clinical researchers in Nigeria as in many LMICs,” says Adewale Adisa, Deputy Lead for the Nigerian Hub and Hospital lead for Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospital, Ile-Ife. He believes that the Collaborative enjoyed such a large buy-into among partners in LMICs because they are involved in all the stages of the research from design to write-up, unlike the previous models where most partners only contribute data to such studies.

Dr. Omolara Williams, the Principal Investigator at Lagos State University describes the COVIDSurg Collaborative award has a delightful surprise that has reinforced the case for strong collaborations, and recognised the hard work of all the researchers from across the globe. She states that *“The spread and diversity of the source of data contribution makes the results applicable by policy makers to different contexts and health systems in addressing the impact of Covid-19 on surgical care. Strong collaborations are essential in today’s world to harness the strength of all stakeholders. Therefore, we must encourage mutually beneficial collaborations to build capacity in medical research, achieve results faster, address disparities and bridge gaps in health outcomes.”*

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, five billion people lacked access to surgical care and 143 million more operations per year were required globally. There was already a major global inequity in access to safe and affordable surgery across low and middle-income countries, with an urgent need to expand capacity. The pandemic has acutely worsened that situation.

Launched in March 2020, the COVIDSurg Collaborative has provided data needed to support changes to surgical delivery in the fastest time frame ever seen by a surgical research group. Research from this huge study group has also explored the timing of surgery after COVID infection, preoperative isolation, and risks of blood clots, all published in the field-leading journal *Anaesthesia*.

Co-author Mr James Glasbey, also a surgical trainee from the University of Birmingham, commented: *“Over 15,000 surgeons and anaesthetists from across 116 countries came together to contribute to this study making it the largest ever scientific collaboration,*

surpassing even ground-breaking research from the Large Hadron Collider at CERN in Switzerland. Every day we hear in the news that waiting lists are growing, and patients are unable to access the surgery that they need. This situation sadly is deteriorating in countries all over the world. Policy makers can use the data from this scientific collaboration to safely restart elective surgery.”

During the first wave of the pandemic, up to 70% of elective surgeries were postponed, resulting in an estimated 28 million procedures being delayed or cancelled. Whilst surgery volumes have started to recover in many countries, ongoing disruption is likely to continue throughout 2021, particularly in the event of countries experiencing further waves of COVID-19. Vaccination is also likely to decrease post-operative pulmonary complications - reducing intensive care use and overall healthcare costs.

ENDS

For more information or interviews , please contact Tony Moran, International Communications Manager, University of Birmingham on +44 (0) 121 414 8254 or +44 (0)782 783 2312. For out-of-hours enquiries, please call +44 (0) 7789 921 165.

Notes to Editors

- The University of Birmingham is ranked amongst the world’s top 100 institutions, its work brings people from across the world to Birmingham, including researchers and teachers and more than 6,500 international students from over 150 countries.
- [*‘SARS-CoV-2 vaccination modelling for safe surgery to save lives: data from an international prospective cohort study’*](#) - COVIDSurg Collaborative is published by the *British Journal of Surgery*.
- The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) awarded £7 million to the University of Birmingham to establish the NIHR Global Health Research Unit on Global Surgery. This unit is engaged in conducting multi-country randomised controlled trials testing interventions to reduce SSI across a range of low- and middle-income countries.

List of participating countries

Country	Participating hospitals	Country	Participating hospitals	Country	Participating hospitals
Albania	3	Hong Kong	4	Qatar	3
Algeria	3	Hungary	6	Rep. North Macedonia	4
Argentina	9	India	56	Romania	18
Aruba	1	Indonesia	10	Russian Federation	23
Australia	44	Iran	16	Rwanda	6
Austria	27	Iraq	7	Saudi Arabia	26
Azerbaijan	2	Ireland	17	Senegal	1

Bahrain	4	Israel	3	Serbia	15
Bangladesh	3	Italy	115	Singapore	4
Barbados	1	Japan	47	Slovakia	2
Belarus	2	Jordan	17	Slovenia	2
Belgium	8	Kazakhstan	5	Somalia	1
Benin	5	Kenya	4	South Africa	9
Bosnia & Herzegovina	2	Korea (Republic)	1	South Sudan	1
Brazil	38	Kuwait	7	Spain	97
Bulgaria	5	Latvia	3	Sri Lanka	11
Cameroon	1	Lebanon	9	Sudan	17
Canada	17	Libya	35	Sweden	9
Chile	9	Lithuania	5	Switzerland	9
China	5	Luxembourg	1	Syrian Arab Republic	14
Colombia	22	Madagascar	6	Taiwan	1
Congo	2	Malaysia	10	Thailand	2
Croatia	8	Malta	1	Trinidad and Tobago	1
Cuba	1	Mexico	26	Tunisia	3
Cyprus	3	Moldova	2	Turkey	47
Czechia	6	Mongolia	1	Uganda	11
Denmark	3	Morocco	7	Ukraine	4
Dominican Rep.	2	Namibia	5	UAE	12
Ecuador	1	Nepal	1	UK	205
Egypt	33	Netherlands	17	USA	69
El Salvador	1	New Zealand	11	Uruguay	2
Estonia	1	Nigeria	31	Yemen	5
Ethiopia	24	Oman	2	Zambia	1
Finland	2	Pakistan	30	Zimbabwe	5
France	44	Palestine	6		
Gabon	2	Panama	1		
Georgia	1	Paraguay	11		
Germany	54	Peru	15		
Ghana	8	Philippines	10		
Greece	30	Poland	4		
Guatemala	9	Portugal	23		

About the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR)

The mission of the NIHR is to improve the health and wealth of the nation through research. We do this by:

- Funding high quality, timely research that benefits the NHS, public health and social care;
- Investing in world-class expertise, facilities and a skilled delivery workforce to translate discoveries into improved treatments and services;
- Partnering with patients, service users, carers and communities, improving the relevance, quality and impact of our research;
- Attracting, training and supporting the best researchers to tackle complex health and social care challenges;
- Collaborating with other public funders, charities and industry to help shape a cohesive and globally competitive research system;
- Funding applied global health research and training to meet the needs of the poorest people in low and middle income countries.

NIHR is funded by the Department of Health and Social Care. Its work in low and middle income countries is principally funded through UK Aid from the UK government.