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# Making a Global Impact One Vaccine at a Time

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# Making a global impact one vaccine at a time

By Janice E. Hawkins and Deborah C. Gray | 03/23/2018

*Sigma members help advance UN's Sustainable Development Goals.*



—Saslistock/iStock

*After becoming aware of the UN Foundation's Shot@Life campaign and its mission to save children's lives around the world through vaccines, the authors got involved.*

Did you know that, worldwide, **almost one third of deaths among children under age 5** can be prevented by vaccines? It's stunning to think that **one child dies every 20 seconds** from an immunization-preventable disease. That equates to 12 lives that could be saved in the time it takes to read this brief article!



**Deborah Gray and Janice Hawkins**

As members of Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing (Sigma), we are well acquainted with and supportive of the work of the United Nations. In 2012, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) granted special consultative status to Sigma based on our organization's expertise in nursing and global health. As part of Sigma's commitment to the U.N. charter, it seeks to raise member awareness of UN activities and initiatives, including information on how we can help advance the 17 **Sustainable Development Goals**, or SDGs.

## **Shot@Life**

Making vaccines available to populations that don't have ready access helps achieve several of these SDGs including Goal 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages) and Goal 10 (Reduce inequalities within and among countries). One initiative that addresses this need is [Shot@Life](#). A grass-roots advocacy campaign of the United Nations Foundation, Shot@Life works with partners and volunteers in the United States and globally to ensure that life-saving vaccines are available in developing countries to prevent measles, polio, pneumonia, and diarrheal disease among children who are hardest to reach. As stated on its website, Shot@Life strives—through education, fundraising, and advocacy—to decrease vaccine-preventable childhood deaths and give every child a shot at a healthy life, no matter where he or she lives.

After becoming aware of Shot@Life and its mission, the two of us signed up to become Shot@Life Champions. It's one way we, as Sigma members, are helping to advance the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. This past year, Shot@Life's network of Champions—people like us—successfully sought to maintain \$573 million in U.S. government funding for global childhood immunizations. In one year, the campaign raised \$4.2 million to directly support the frontline activities of UNICEF, WHO, and the Global Vaccine Alliance, which went toward saving 89,780 children.

## **Global focus**

We recently returned from the 7th Annual Shot@Life Summit that took place in Washington, D.C. This year, 120 Champions from 35 U.S. states and from all walks of life, including many nurses and nursing students, came together to learn from global health experts and brush up on advocacy skills.

On Day 1, we listened to multiple presentations and participated in panel discussions designed to educate, inspire, and empower us. U.N. Foundation leaders reminded attendees of the continuing need for global vaccine funding, as well as important points of progress. (Polio has been reduced by 99 percent and is now found in only three countries.) Experts provided updates on global health funding and disease eradication initiatives, as well as emerging technologies and innovations in vaccine delivery. We learned skills to enhance our digital storytelling and social media campaigns, including the use of #VaccinesWork.

Day 2 began with an inspirational speech by [Dennis Ogbe](#), polio survivor from Nigeria and U.S. Paralympian. Ogbe, a longtime Shot@Life Champion and activist for eradicating polio—this was his seventh summit—encouraged other Champions to share their personal advocacy stories with legislators about their passion for increasing global access to childhood vaccinations.



**Dennis Ogbe, polio survivor from Nigeria and U.S. Paralympian, inspired and challenged conference attendees.**

[Orin Levine](#), director of global development for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and [Peter Yeo](#), president of Better World Campaign and vice president of advocacy at the U.N. Foundation, were keynote speakers on the final day of the summit. Both shared success stories of U.N. progress in advancing global health and highlighted the important role of grassroots activism in achieving those milestones.

As Shot@Life Champions, we have had wonderful opportunities to learn, empower others, and thus truly impact the lives of children and their families around the world. We're proud to participate in an activity that helps achieve the [Sustainable Development Goals](#). As Hillary Brandt, a DNP student at George Mason University, commented, "Ensuring a healthy global population is in the best interest of every resident of planet Earth." [RNL](#)

***Janice E. Hawkins, PhD, RN, senior lecturer and undergraduate departmental adviser at Old Dominion University School of Nursing in Norfolk, Virginia, USA, is a retired Army nurse. Her background in maternal child nursing together with her travels around the world have made her keenly aware of the need for access to life-saving vaccinations for all.***

***Deborah C. Gray, DNP, RN, FNP-C, lecturer in the Doctor of Nursing Practice at Old Dominion University School of Nursing, is director of the school's family nurse practitioner program and chairs the International Council of Nurses International Nurse Practitioner Network Research Group. Shot@Life Champion co-leader for the state of Virginia, Gray has done volunteer health work in the Caribbean, Central America, and Africa, and her passion***

*is to improve global population health, particularly through childhood immunization.*

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