



Alcohol and Public Health: Framing and communicating risk

Tuesday November 20th 2018

**Drug and Alcohol Research Centre
Middlesex University**

The aims

The conference will aim to critically examine:

- the processes through which complex research findings on risk factors are 'translated' into public communication;
- the factors which influence how public communication is framed;
- and the ethical dilemmas that may arise in the processes of selection and interpretation of research findings for public communication.

The issue

Research findings are often complex, generally first disseminated in academic or professional journals and directed towards other academics, professionals and policy makers. They provide the 'evidence' which is transmitted to a wider public through media reports, official guidelines, advocacy websites and newsletters.

The process of translating research into public messages inevitably involves interpretation, selection and emphasis on chosen parts of the evidence. The message is often placed within a 'frame' (or 'frames') of understanding which influences how the process evolves. For instance, the frequently stated belief that messages to the public should be simple and consistent to avoid confusion, 'frames' the general public as unable to process and use more complex information and at the same time provides implicit guidelines for the production of the public message. Similarly how risk factors are framed and communicated may convey very different 'facts' about the level of risk depending on the use of statistics, the language in which the message is couched and the context in which it is conveyed.

How transparent is the process of translating complex research findings for public consumption? Are there ethical dilemmas arising from the need to select and emphasise some 'facts' to the exclusion of others or from the way in which statistics are presented or from assumptions regarding what the public understands or 'needs to know'? What happens to the research findings as they shift into and between different transmission modes and pathways – from journals and reports to official public health messages to advocacy documents or into the media?

Over recent decades, public health has assumed a prominent role in conveying research-based messages to the public on a range of health behaviour issues. But the

processes by which this is done remain obscure and the relationship between research and public messages as an output are relatively unexplored. There is great interest in public health communication, in the strategies and methods by which public health can convey credible, accessible information – but it has taken root in the USA and there is little evidence of interest or activity in the UK. This conference will aim to open up a discussion on the issues outlined above in relation to alcohol research and information to the public on alcohol consumption and related risks.

Venue

The Boardroom (C219-220), 2nd Floor College Building, access via main entrance. Middlesex University, The Burroughs, Hendon, London NW4 4BT.

Programme

9. am: Registration and coffee

9.30 am: Welcome and introduction to the conference

10-10.45 am: Dr. Adam Burgess, Professor of Risk Research, University of Kent: *Effective lifestyle risk communication: What are the challenges?*

10.45-11.30 am: Dr. John Coggon, Professor of Law, Bristol University (Honorary Member, UK Faculty of Public Health, Co-Director, Centre for Health, Law, and Society) *Ethical considerations in framing and communicating public health information.*

11.30- 11.45 pm: Break

11.45- 12.30 pm: Dr. Alex Mold, Associate Professor in History, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. *Alcohol and health education in the 1970s and 1980s.*

12.30- 1.15 pm: Lunch

1.15-1.45 pm: Dr. Janne Tolstrup, Professor at the National Institute of Public Health, University of Southern Denmark. *Case Study: Alcohol and Cancer – informing the public.*

1.45-2.15 pm: Julian Strizek, Mag. Austrian Public Health Institute, Vienna. *Case Study: Measuring alcohol-related harm to others.*

2.15-2.45 pm: Dr. Emma Milne and Dr. Rachel Herring, Middlesex University. *Case Study: Drinking in Pregnancy – a precautionary tale?*

2.45- 3 pm: Break

3.-4.15pm: *Panel commentaries and discussion:* chaired and led by Dr. Susanne MacGregor, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine; with contributions from UK and European delegates.

4.15pm: Close of conference

The conference is supported by a Network Development Grant from Alcohol Research UK and by *Drugs Education Prevention and Policy*