

This response was submitted to the consultation held by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics on *Public Health: ethical issues* between May and September 2006. The views expressed are solely those of the respondent(s) and not those of the Council.

Dr Allison Streetly, Programme Director, NHS Sickle Cell and Thalassaemia Screening Programme

Supplementation of food and water

- We still struggle to get folic acid fortification of white bread in the UK which could potentially have an important impact on reducing foetal anomalies. In my view the individual rights argument is played too strongly against the public good argument in this case – specifically when the benefits have been clearly demonstrated in other countries. More emphasis on the need to address this issue should be made before a long consideration of fluoridation issues. The report would be better if it made more of this area first where the evidence is clearer than in the fluoridation debate.

Ethical issues

- In your view, is there one of the following principles that is generally more important than the others: autonomy, solidarity, fair reciprocity, harm principle, consent, trust (see Section 5 in Part B)? If so, which one and why? Are there any other important principles that need to be considered?
- Which ideas or principles should guide parents in their decisions?

Why is this question only framed at parents? It is a more general issue than just for parents. A much clearer and more confident steer on what the expert opinion is would be helpful for parents – often lacking.

At present much too much emphasises is on the one to one contact with professionals and much too little on the social marketing and public education (including public education of journalists) on balancing rights and responsibilities. A more informed and educated public would allow a better and more open, less sensational debate and ultimately a better one to one consultation with health care professionals.

Other case studies could have been chosen to illustrate the same types of tensions and conflicts. We would be interested to hear if you think that there are other types of ethically relevant issues concerning public health that we should address.

I am sorry to see no mention of public health genetics issues. Although you have updated the genetics report last month this is quite clinically focused and I think a consideration of public health genetics issues would be useful in this report. There is considerable misunderstanding of the difference between screening and testing and the report on Public Health ethical issues could usefully consider the differences between a biomedical ethical framework and a public health ethical framework here. The genetics report doesn't really consider pre-conceptual screening and testing at all which it should. A review of the literature around this area for Tay-Sachs and

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Thalassaemia (in middle eastern countries) would be good as at present this is scarcely covered. The lack of a clearly articulated public health ethical framework in the UK for this area (due to fears about eugenics for example) is a problem. There is some consideration of the issue in the USA but it seems to be avoided here.