

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.

Mr Robert Warwick

QUESTIONS ANSWERED:

Question 1 The definition of public health

ANSWER:

Yes I do agree with the definition. However the role of Government, the individual and communities are implicit in the word Society. I think it would be helpful to make this explicit.

Question 4 Control of infectious disease

ANSWER:

Issues such as forced quarantine during pandemic outbreaks of flu or other diseases will not be helpful. For one thing, at a time of national emergency when resources are stretched, there will be little benefit in making criminals of people who have their own reason for not complying. Those reasons are best addressed by education. So, carrot rather than stick in my opinion. Also, by the time you will be taking these people through the judicial system the emergency is likely to be over, so where is the benefit to society? On the issue of the state providing resource to other states the question is simplistic. There are at least two dimensions; capacity and capability. If a fellow state does not have the capability then the UK should do what it reasonably can to plug the short-term gap (i.e. immediate help) and support the state to meet longer-term threats. On the issue of capacity (i.e. financial or human resources) a more measured view can be taken on a case-by-case basis. On the issue of mandatory testing the argument will be influenced by "down stream" considerations. There is little point providing a test, even if it is easy to do, if no corrective or preventative action for the individual or society as a whole can be achieved. If such beneficial action were to be available the threshold at which one would consider mandatory testing would be very high indeed in order to over ride the UK's culture of personal freedom.

Question 5 Obesity

ANSWER:

Government does have a role to play, but it needs to balance this with being accused of "nannying". This is difficult. Government has a role to play in increasing awareness of the problem i.e. increasing the sense of urgency. It also has a role to play in coordinating responses and ideas from food companies, schools, communities, ethnic groups and other stakeholders. It needs to be very cautious of direct involvement. In terms of measure I think the focus should be on equality of outcome, rather than proving equality of service. For obese people this may mean providing more healthcare or sometimes less. By less I mean that if a person's health could be harmed by a medical intervention that would be provided to a non-obese person then that is appropriate for consideration. Health is increasingly a partnership between doctors, nurses and other healthcare providers and the individual. Without appropriate reciprocity by the individual the individual will influence his or her equality of outcome mentioned above. The role of the individual is also about responsibilities as well as rights.

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Question 6 Smoking

ANSWER:

When it comes to companies that sell tobacco there is an argument that they are simply trying to maintain or increase their market share i.e. not influencing the total number of smokers. This can be hard to believe. In my opinion these companies should prove, beyond a high level of doubt, that this is the case, particularly for young people and women. Only if they pass this test should they be given the freedom to market their goods. If this test is not met they can still sell their products, but only in plain generic packaging. When it comes to smokers having higher level of resources the element of choice needs to be considered. In my experience many smokers have little or no choice by the time smoking starts to affect their health. Therefore I believe this should be reflected in the amount of resource they receive.

Question 7 Alcohol

ANSWER:

When it comes to alcohol initiatives lagging behind those on smoking I think there are a number of reasons, not all of them logical. In the UK alcohol is often seen as oiling the wheels of society. Also, the effects, other than binge drinking on a Friday night in most towns and cities, are hidden. Chronic alcoholics are often secretive in their illness with only close family and friends aware of the impact, both in terms of damaging their own health and domestic violence. In short, it is an issue we find easier to ignore.

Question 8 Supplementation of food and water

ANSWER:

When it comes to supplementation of water and food there are different emotional dynamics at work. I believe that people have an emotional attachment to the purity of water. This goes back to the times even before Snow and his discoveries on the epidemiology of Cholera. However, with food people are often more than happy to tolerate quiet extensive manipulation of the raw foodstuff from the farm to the shop.

Question 9 Ethical issues

ANSWER:

Regarding ethical issues the five principles adequately cover the field. However, rather than seeing this as a hierarchy, which seems to be a human habit of putting things nicely in order, I think it is more useful considering them as a matrix with each bound to the other by a thread. Sometimes this will be complementary at other times there will be tension. I would however like to see consideration given to mental health and capacity to consider these issues. At times these concepts are sub-conscious and deep seated in the mind, at other times they need to be articulated and influence our conscious decision-making. Capacity and mental health are important enabling factors when engaged in an individual dialogue or wider policy issues. When it comes to guiding parents on decision making there is an increasing

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issue of the plurality of information. For example, one only has to look at the impact that Dr Andrew Wakefield had on MMR uptake as a result of his rather weak link between the vaccination and autism. Also, there is also the increasing impact of the internet. Information is harder to control and it can gather a pace and direction that is harder to predict and influence