

Introduction: responsibility of governments

- I believe that governments also have an obligation to look for and detect threats to population health and to take action to minimize risks to communities
- Governments should provide individuals with information and pathways that help people to maximise their health potential; this includes developing novel means of communication that reach groups with poor literacy and/or educational achievement
- Governments have a responsibility to minimise poverty, maximise literacy and promote community self-reliance as a means to promoting equity of health. Health inequalities are a product of failed social and/or economic policy but cannot be effectively addressed through health policy.

Introduction: responsibilities of individuals

- People should be free to live their lives regardless of implications for health, though the health service should do more to detect mental ill-health and support individuals who live without hope to take a more positive approach to life
- People who deliberately or negligently behave in ways to harm their health invariably do so due to poor mental health and yes, they should have entitlement to medical care
- All health risks should be evaluated in the same way

Introduction: responsibilities of communities etc.

- A purchaser of a product is responsible for their purchase. The manufacturer should be responsible for ensuring the purchaser is aware of any health risks associated with a product and should also be responsible for keeping up to date with possible health risks associated with their products
- Manufacturers of products known to cause harm e.g. tobacco and alcohol should not be able to advertise in a way that promotes the idea that their product improves the experience of life. They should not be able to sell in ways that take advantage of vulnerable people, including people with poor mental health or people under the influence of alcohol (when judgement is known to be impaired). I believe they should not be allowed to advertise unless those advertisements clearly set out the risks.

The definition of public health

- A definition of public health should, in my view, include the assessment of health risks to individuals and communities, and development of principles and actions that enable communities and individuals to address those risk.

Factors that influence public health

- To improve public health one needs to also consider the view that individuals have of health. Mental health is thus a major determinant, as are life opportunities and related to these literacy and educational attainment.

Prevention of infectious disease through vaccination

- I do not believe that vaccination should be compulsory, but that it should be part of a contract between state and individuals. Vaccination benefits the commonweal so if somebody wants to benefit from the public purse (for example access to free school meals) then they might only be eligible following take up of vaccination. (This principle could be applied to other interventions that benefit the commonweal.)

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- Should the state decide to vaccinate a child by order of a court to protect that child from serious risk of harm. It might be reasonable to vaccinate a child against the wishes of a parent at the request of, or with the consent of two grandparents/uncles/aunts.

Control of infectious disease

- We should not be free to harm others. At a point where it is clear that freedom to travel poses a serious risk of spread of a disease that frequently results in fatality, from sound epidemiology, then it is reasonable, nay essential, to remove that freedom. This restriction of freedom needs to be proportionate to the risk.
- It is essential in my view that governments take all reasonable measures to detect and deal with threats to health. Modern diagnostic techniques make early detection easier and governments should, in my view, invest more in surveillance of communicable diseases.
- There is a need to define "essential" and "non-essential" travel and for there to be a system of acquiring permits for essential travel in times of serious outbreak (in such circumstances people would be required to register their intention to travel with the health service before booking a ticket). Ideally governments should be asked to develop systems to be accredited by the World Health Organisation. Individuals who suffer materially from travel restrictions should be eligible to compensation, in recognition of the contribution they have made to the commonwealth.
- Mandatory testing for highly infectious and life-threatening conditions should only be mandatory when a person is identified as being part of a proven high-risk group and is undertaking activities known to be associated with spread. (So an emergency medicine doctor who has been working in a HIV endemic country who is going to undertake invasive surgery in another country should be subject to testing before being permitted to undertake that invasive surgery.)

Obesity

- It is reasonable to place differential taxes on food products according to the positive or negative impact they have on health
- Policy should, if possible, be consistent. Just as we now have legislation that reduces freedom of smokers to contaminate the air breathed by others in enclosed spaces, so obese people should not be free, for example, to restrict the space that people purchase to travel on buses, trains and planes.
- Children need to be reasonably protected from harm that may come from poor parental understanding of health risks and organisations such as schools and hospitals should be expected to understand health issues and required to minimize possible health risks to their clients
- I do not support the idea that individuals should be denied treatment due to obesity, unless their obesity increases the risk of an unsuccessful outcome to an intervention. Help with changing lifestyle should be publicly funded.

Smoking

- The consensus is that governments were reluctant to sacrifice tax income from cigarettes and many politicians are likely to have been influenced by the lobbying of the tobacco industry, not least politicians who themselves smoke. It is well for political parties to appreciate the votes that can be won by advocating health improving measures
- Dangerous substances should be sold under licence and subject to taxes in proportion to the cost of resulting harm. There should be a level playing field, with drugs that are currently illegal treated in the same way as tobacco and alcohol.
- Smokers do use health resources. They already contribute more through the tax paid on tobacco purchases. Is that tax sufficient to meet the increased cost associated with tobacco-related disease and loss of working hours? It should be. Smokers might be required to stop smoking for a minimum period before surgery requiring general anaesthesia due to the associated increase in risks and longer average length of stay (so higher cost of episode)

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- The state should not prevent people from smoking so long as other people are not harmed and the state should only become involved in domestic issues at the request of a resident. The sale of tobacco should be licensed, to emphasise the presence of dangerous chemicals and the fact that increased dosage results in increased harm. The state should make it impossible for the tobacco industry to promote smoking in children and teenagers, should promote the association between underage smoking and poor mental health and offer support for any young person who smokes.

Alcohol

- Alcohol is widely perceived as being innocent, not least because of the enjoyment it often brings though lowering of inhibition and relaxation of critical faculties. The alcohol industry is also very rich and in a good position to lobby politicians. Which politician will get tough on alcohol when they have just drunk an excellent glass of wine or beer? Which politician wants to be seen as a "kill joy"?
- I believe that retailers should be obliged to test clients (for breath alcohol and for coordination) before selling alcohol and it should be a criminal offence for retailers to sell alcohol to a person who has excessive breath alcohol or who has lost co-ordination.

Supplementation of food and water

- Fluoridation has met with resistance in my view simply because fluorine is perceived as a poison. Also with fluoride commonly available in toothpaste consumers can choose to protect their teeth – or not. Some ask why government does not insist on fluoride being in all toothpastes rather than in water.
- Such measures should be approved through local government, with local people persuaded by fact and debate. The role of Parliament should be to ensure that local government seeks the consent of their voters, that publishing misleading information is made illegal, that media is monitored and censured if they give airtime to lies and that the general public is provided with high quality and accessible information on which to base a decision.
- The health of all of us depends to a large extent on what happens to us as children. It is reasonable to restrict the freedom of individuals to protect the health of children, but only when the health threat is serious. I don't think fluoridation qualifies.

Ethical issues

- My ordering: (i) harm; (ii) consent; (iii) fair reciprocity; (iv) autonomy; (v) solidarity and (vi) trust. I put harm as number one as this is an adverse effect on a person or group of people. Other principles might include "proportionality"
- Parents might be guided in their decision by being asked to think about the adverse effect of poor health on them, the improved life chances of good health (yes, sparkling teeth and firm body!) and what they would have liked from their parents by way of support towards optimum health.

Other ethically relevant issues

- It is legal for businesses to profit from products that do harm; for shareholders to gain while consumers lose. There ought to be a name for this (perhaps something that makes us think of "pimps"?) and we should move to make this less and less morally acceptable if not illegal. Perhaps a requirement to state health impact in company accounts and to be signed off by a public health official as on balance doing more good than harm?

Ways of influencing public health: the element of personal control

- People will take more risks if those risks are associated with increased pleasure or increasing the chances of achieving please. Associated with this is the fact that personal values can be communicated by some risk-taking behaviours, that assists with social bonding of groups of people who share the same values or approach to life.