

Mind your language!

We've developed a different sort of health campaign, the team behind the government's Change4Life initiative told the British Science Association's Science Communication Conference.



Softly softly

'Change4Life aims to reduce the proportion of overweight and obese children to 2000 levels by 2020,' Department of Health marketing expert Alison Hardy told the Conference. 'Most people think obesity has nothing to do with them,' she continued. 'We don't mention obesity or weight, but we do explain that storing excess fat in the body can lead to ill health.'

'Public health campaigns usually work by scaring people,' James Lowther of advertising agency M&C Saatchi explained. 'The Change4Life initiative is full of positive rather than negative messages. We set out to charm people with plasticene and cartoon "everyman" figures and worked hard to express scientific nutritional messages simply,' he added.

Pithy and memorable

Professor Susan Jebb of the Medical Research Council Collaborative Centre for Human Nutrition Research told *People & Science*, 'It was hard to distil some messages, for instance that smaller children need smaller portions. The first suggestion was "little people's portions" but it sounded patronizing for ten-year-olds, so we went to the idea of "me-sized meals".'

Despite their efforts, the team didn't get it all right first time. 'It was extremely distressing that the campaign did not initially distinguish between type 1 and type 2 diabetes,' Jackie Jacobs, Chair of the UK Children with Diabetes Advocacy Group told *People & Science*. The mistake led to children with type 1 being bullied and teased at school for having diabetes. 'More than 90% of children with diabetes have type 1, which is not preventable and not related to diet or lack of exercise,' she added. Change4Life now talks about the risk of type 2 diabetes.

Measuring success

Over 300,000 families have signed up for information packs and most people nationally have heard of the campaign and seen its television adverts. Hardy told the conference: 'There is a small number of people who are not aware of the campaign... mostly educated, high income professionals, who already have a healthy lifestyle.'

The long-term effects of the campaign will be harder to measure but Finland has had success in persuading people to change their habits to prevent cardiovascular disease. Marja-Leena Ovaskainen, senior researcher at Finland's National Institute for Health and Welfare, told *People & Science*: 'Our success story is decreased cholesterol levels. We persuaded people to change from animal fats to oils and vegetable-based margarines.'

The Geiger-Müller Groove

A girl group's rap called the Geiger-Müller Groove has won the most entertaining, best original score and best physics film awards in the Planet SciCast competition for mini movies of exciting science experiments made by young people. The film can be viewed at www.planet-sci-cast.com

Sea challenge

Media specialists have met to discuss how to engage the public with marine science. 'Ocean images and video footage show how deepwater technology and the Internet help scientists reach young people,' Kim Marshall-Brown of the National Oceanography Centre, Southampton, told the European Geosciences Union's general assembly in Vienna.

Tweet tweet

Press officers can use Twitter to bypass journalists and communicate research directly to the public, Imperial College London Press Officer Lucy Goodchild told the British Science Association's Science Communication Conference. 'People will increasingly look to press officers and scientists themselves for information, rather than to an intermediary,' she said.

Examining how science works

Around 1150 students sat the first AS exam in 'Science in Society' in June and the first students are beginning classes for their second year of A-level. The Nuffield Foundation course aims to develop the knowledge and skills that are needed for students to understand how science works, analyse contemporary issues and communicate their appreciation to others.

Where's my ignoramus?

The public is as ignorant now of anatomy as it was 40 years ago, research has shown. So it is timely that Channel 4 and the Wellcome Collection are working to engage people through an innovative television series and exhibition of Victorian wax anatomical models.

Ignorance or bliss

Professor John Weinman of King's College London repeated a survey first conducted and published in 1970^{1,2}. 'Surprisingly, we found that overall levels of anatomical knowledge had not changed at all since 1970. Most of the patient groups we looked at didn't have a clearer idea of where their affected organ was than the general public,' he told *People & Science*.

'Some of my colleagues think it's dreadful,' he continued, 'but why would you expect people to have detailed anatomical knowledge?' He does think it's important, however: 'We know that if doctors and patients do use the same language, and have shared knowledge, patients are much more satisfied. Doctors must not assume that patients know where their organs are.'

Live surgery

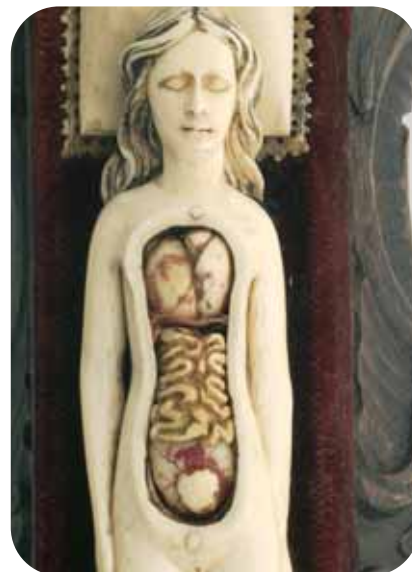
It seems that the public does want to know more about how the human body works. The recent Channel 4 series *The Operation: Surgery Live* attracted over a million

viewers, according to Mr Francis Wells, the consultant heart surgeon who organised the series. In each of the four live broadcast programmes, a different surgeon performed a different operation, at the same time answering questions from members of the public.

'I wanted to make the public aware of the fragility – and beauty – of the human body. Inside the body is enormously colourful and hardly anybody is aware of that,' said Francis Wells. 'I also hoped the series would inspire people to become surgeons and show that the most important person in the operating theatre is the patient. There's no doubt we met our objectives,' he continued: '[The volume of traffic to our group] closed down Facebook and we were the biggest site ever on twitter.'

A model history

Wellcome Collection hosted a live studio audience for the programmes but is also staging an exhibition of historical anatomical models. 'So-called "anatomical Venuses" were wax models of women that could be taken apart to show their internal



organs, often complete with a foetus. They were used by teachers of anatomy but were also fairground attractions, educating large numbers of the public,' said Kate Forde, one of the curators of the exhibition.

Information on *The Operation: Surgery Live* is available at www.channel4.com.

The *Exquisite bodies* exhibition is free and open until 18 October. More details are available from <http://www.wellcomecollection.org/>

¹ Weinman J (2009), How accurate is patients' knowledge: a cross-sectional, questionnaire study of six patient groups and a general public sample, *BMC Family Practice* **10**, 43

² Boyle CM (1970), Differences between patients' and doctors' interpretation of some common medical terms, *BMJ* **1**, 286



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A new selection

The House of Commons has decided to establish a new Science and Technology Select Committee from 1 October. The new committee revives the membership of the Select Committee that shadowed the work of the Department of Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills (DIUS). Phil Willis, MP, will continue as chair.

Rewarding engagement

Engagement helps create an environment for the best research, said Roger Grinyer of the Higher Education Funding Council for England. 'The Research Excellence Framework (REF) will include an assessment of the research environment, recognising the importance of engagement,' he added. The REF will inform research funding from 2014.

Straight talking

Statisticians, legislators and journalists (including Ben Goldacre and Nigel Hawkes) have got together to improve the public uses of statistics. 'The Straight Statistics campaign is about exposing bad practice and rewarding good,' says Hawkes. 'We want to stop the public from being hoodwinked by twisted numbers.' Further information is online at <http://straightstatistics.org>

Origins

There are many people in the UK who do not subscribe to Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, a British Council survey has found. Nearly a quarter (23 per cent) of respondents in London believe in creation, compared to only 18 per cent in Wales. The survey can be completed at <http://tinyurl.com/nu96wt>