Forging the future: is the injury prevention community a learning organisation?

Roderick J McClure

It is 70 years since John Gordon wrote ‘The epidemiology of accidents’ in the American Journal of Public Health1 and 55 years since Haddon W Jr and colleagues edited the text book ‘Accident Research: Methods and Approaches’ published by Harper and Row.2 Thirty years ago, the First World Conference on Accident and Injury Prevention was held in Stockholm. Twenty-five years ago, Injury Prevention published our first issue. In the modern form, injury prevention is no longer new. Does the field of injury prevention yet have the level of self-confidence required to step forward with purpose into the future?

I was at an international meeting recently where there was much reference to ‘the injury prevention community’. At this same meeting, there was also much discussion about how the injury prevention community needs to be more effective in influencing governments, institutions, industry, funders and members of the public to better support our community’s activities and goals. “If other people listened to us more and took our advice, the world would be a safer place.”

Is there a cancer prevention community? A cardiovascular disease prevention community? A kidney disease prevention community? If not, what does this say about our collective identity as injury preventers, and about the way we see our contribution? Should we be distinguishing ourselves as a community apart from the world we try to influence, or should we function as component parts of other people’s systems?

Let us suppose for a moment there is a single injury prevention community, do we have: a common vision of our goals, a holistic appreciation of the inter-relationships between our component parts, continual effective communication of the mental models that underpin our work, advanced collaborative dynamics that drive adaptive changes in our personal and collective underpinning values? If our injury prevention community had those attributes, our conferences would be structured to support our continually self-transforming inquiry.

I began by arguing the injury community away suggesting it was more important that we become indistinguishable from the society of which we are part. I then argued it back as a self-help group to provide opportunities for ‘collaborative double loop learning’.3 I conclude by arguing the need for injury preventers to be both. People wholly integrated in the interstitial structures of society and yet also engaged with injury prevention colleagues in a process of collective learning.

Are we up to the challenge of working in the world beyond our support base as integral parts of other people’s systems? Do we want to develop a conference series that defines frameworks, sets courses of action and holds the injury prevention community self-accountable for global injury outcomes? Does anyone want to play the 20 questions game?

The authors have not declared a specific grant for this research from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

None declared.

Not required.

Not commissioned; internally peer reviewed.

© Author(s) (or their employer(s)) 2019. No commercial re-use. See rights and permissions. Published by BMJ.


doi:10.1136/injuryprev-2019-043199

REFERENCES


3 Senge P. The Fifth Discipline; the art and practice of the learning organization. USA: Currency, 1990.