Consumer activism pays big dividends in USA

Homer said that “The mark of wisdom is to read aright the present, and to march with the occasion.” In this regional report from the US, I commend those businesses and media outlets in America who have had the wisdom to listen to the concerns of injury prevention advocates and to either voluntarily withdraw their questionable products from the market and/or to change their advertising strategies. A few examples from various injury risk areas follow.

Newsweek (chooking prevention)

In spring of 1997, Newsweek published a special edition entitled, “Your Child From Birth to Three”. One chart called “Building Health Habits” contained a serious error. It said that five-month-old babies could hand feed themselves zwiebacks or raw carrot chunks—a clear choking hazard for young children. In response to the concerns of the safety community, Newsweek published a correction in a subsequent issue, promising to send corrected versions of the early childhood issue to newstands, hospitals, and doctors’ offices. Any subscriber who wanted a corrected version of the chart was invited to call a toll-free number.

Mattel (toy safety)

In 1996, Mattel introduced the Cabbage Patch Snacktime Kids who were supposed to munch on plastic cookies and French fries. About 500,000 dolls were sold. In response to media reports that the snacking doll preferred to eat children’s hair and fingers, Mattel pulled the dolls off the toy store shelves, ordering retailers to return any unsold dolls and offering $40 refunds to any dissatisfied consumers who had bought the dolls.

Haggar pants (fire prevention)

In 1997, Haggar Clothing Manufacturers produced a commercial in which a man re-enters a burning building to retrieve his pants. Upon seeing this ad, a New York fire chief called Haggar to complain that the fire safety community spends considerable time and energy trying to teach the public to “get out and stay out” of a burning building (personal communication). The fire chief alerted the National Fire Protection Association as well, and working together, they convinced Haggar to pull the ad immediately.

Northwest Airlines (drowning prevention)

On 26 April 1997, USA Today published a Northwest Airlines ad which depicted a child bending over with his head in a five gallon bucket. The copy read, “Great summer savings on Northwest Airlines. Looking for a new vacation spot?” Ann Brown of the US Consumer Product Safety Commission called the Chief Executive Officer of Northwest and he agreed to pull the ad immediately. As a result, the ad ran only once anywhere—in that issue of USA Today. In addition Northwest published an article on hidden hazards in the home in its September 1997 in-flight magazine, World Traveler.

Unfortunately, the same stock photo ran again in an advertisement for Nature’s Solutions herbal supplements in the February 1999 issue of Parenting. The editor printed an apology in a later issue, stating that “we regret the picture slipped though our normally stringent ad review process. Nature’s Solutions has stopped using the ad, and has appointed a child safety advocate to review all of its promotional and advertising materials.

My thesis is that every single one of us in the injury prevention community can make a difference in influencing corporate America. Taking five minutes to communicate our concerns about a new product or its promotion in writing or by telephone is no little thing, but rather can produce tremendous results in the safety arena. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “Sometimes when I consider what tremendous consequences come from little things—a chance word, a tap on the shoulder, or a penny dropped on a newstand—I am tempted to think there are no little things.”

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7 Editor’s note. Parenting Magazine May 1999: 15.

Report from Portugal

Inedibles in food

In May, Portugal became the first EU member state to publish a law forbidding unwrapped inedibles from being sold with food. Portugal’s child safety organisation, APSI, was concerned about it and in its strategies for the year 2002 it aims to have a law defining minimum requirements for the safe transport of children.

Children in cars

It is still possible to buy child restraints to the now out of date European regulation R44.02 in Portugal, mainly old models from Portuguese manufacturers. APSI has been undertaking regular surveys of the way children are carried in cars. The most recent was in June 1999, and although the number of children properly restrained is slowly rising, it is still very low—only 21% of children under 12 are properly restrained. For children aged 3 years and under, half of the children were restrained although the observers, who were checking from outside the vehicle, reported that one third of these are obviously misused. The main errors noted were infant seats facing forward, infant seats lying on the car seat without being restrained, children unrestrained while the seat is restrained, and children restrained in an unrestrained seat!

Accident prevention in Portugal’s health strategies

The Ministry of Health has published the Strategies for Health including targets for a reduction by 2007 of 30% in road crash deaths and a reduction in injuries at home and school and during leisure activities. The targets for 2002 include a fall by 15% of the road accident mortality rate by raising of restraint use, legislation for safe school bus transportation, compulsory use of cycle helmet and other issues related to cycling.

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Injury surveillance in Northern Ireland

A recent development in Northern Ireland shows much promise for injury control in the province. A new electronic injury surveillance system has been introduced at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children, our only paediatric hospital. Information on the cause of injury is being collected on all children presenting to the accident and emergency department. The first six months’ data has been examined for completeness and accuracy.
A memorial to Colonel John Stapp

Colonel John Stapp, whose sled testing resulted in the basic design for present day safety harnesses, died recently. Sue Baker writes below about a fellowship in his memory.

The death of Colonel Stapp leaves a big hole in our universe. The gap will always be there, as the next generation of leaders, the Johns Hopkins Center for Injury Research and Policy has established the John Paul Stapp Endowed Fellowship. Interest from the endowment will go to students whose research and study focus on aviation safety, highway safety, or biomechanics—areas that have benefited greatly from Colonel Stapp’s historic research.

Contributions of any size will be welcomed. Gifts of $500 to $2500 will be matched by faculty members at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health. A gift or pledge of $50 000 or more payable over five years to the Stapp Fellowship will be matched by a gift from Michael Bloomberg, chairman of the Johns Hopkins University Board of Trustees. In addition, up to 10 bequests or planned gifts of $100 000 or more will be matched through the Bloomberg Challenge.

For more information about the endowment contact Sue Baker (tel: +1 410 955 2078 or e-mail: sbaker@jhshp.edu). Contributions or pledges to Johns Hopkins University, earmarked for the Stapp Fellowship, can be sent to the Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health, 614 N Wolfe St, Baltimore, MD 21205, USA.

BOOK REVIEW


This book comes with a comment form so that readers can evaluate its worth. I found this very useful starting point when reviewing the text and would encourage everyone else to use it too. As a researcher and practitioner who has had experience of evaluating injury prevention programmes, I was interested to see what this United States text has to offer, and how applicable it is to the UK.

The purpose of the book is to help those working in injury prevention understand (1) why evaluation is worth the resources and effort involved, (2) how evaluation is conducted, and (3) how to incorporate evaluation into programmes.

The book is divided into three main sections as outlined above. Section one is brief but covers important issues such as why evaluate, what components go into good evaluation, who should conduct evaluations and what type of information evaluation will provide. In general the content of this section is good, however it is not always easy to follow as it often refers pages further on in the book. The least useful element of this section (for me) is the part that looks at “choosing the evaluator”. I believe most people reading this book will be doing so because they themselves will be carrying out an evaluation, or teaching others how to evaluate—not hiring an evaluation consultant.

Section two describes each of the four stages of evaluation: formative, process, outcome, and impact. The appendix contains basic samples of “questions to ask, events to observe, and who or what to count” during evaluation. Not all the ideas included being based on injury prevention programmes the CDC currently fund. Although most injury prevention programmes worldwide would most likely fit into one of their 12 categories, I feel that this is not appropriate for an international audience. Appendix C contains a comprehensive and well structured checklist of tasks that can be used for reference. Appendix E, the glossary, is absolutely essential for anyone starting out in the evaluation of unintentional injury prevention programmes, and appendix D contains a basic bibliography.

On the whole I think this is a good resource for practitioners in the field of injury prevention. I do feel, however, that the book tries to cater for too wide an audience—for those with little or no experience of evaluation, to those who will use it as a teaching tool. The quality of the information from being very useful and relevant, to extremely basic and perhaps a little condescending to the reader. Despite these criticisms I would definitely recommend this book to practitioners for personal reference. I would suggest, however, that it would be best used as a teaching resource for injury prevention coordinators who are training others in programme evaluation.

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19–25 November 2000, Canberra, Australia. Further information: Injury 2000 Prevention and Management, PO Box 1280, Milton, Queensland 4064, Australia (tel: +61 (0) 7 3858 5410; fax: +61 (0) 7 3858 5510; e-mail: injury2000@im.com.au).

10th International Conference on Safe Communities
21–23 May 2001, Anchorage, Alaska. This conference will focus on the opportunities in the new millennium for community based injury prevention programming. Further information: Diana Hudson, PO Box 210736, Anchorage, Alaska 99521, USA (tel: +1 907 929 3939, fax: +1 907 929 3940).

Nordic Safe Community Conference
21–24 August 2001, Denmark. Further information: Moa Sundström, Karolinska Institutet, Department of Public Health Sciences, Division of Social Medicine, Norrbacka, 2nd Floor, SE-176 76 Stockholm, Sweden (fax: +46 8 33 46 93, e-mail: moa.sundstrom@socmed.sll.se).

Honorary editors honoured
Not one but two of our honorary editors have been honoured. We are proud and delighted that Sue Baker has received the American Public Health Association Award for Excellence and Hugh Jackson will be the recipient of the James Spence Medal from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. In both cases these awards signify not only that the recipients’ peers recognise their contributions to their respective disciplines, but also that the field of injury prevention is one worthy of such recognition, largely as a result of their efforts.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Open invitation from the International Poverty and Health Network to all health professionals
E D I T O R, —Always and everywhere, the challenge for all health professionals is to understand, from a position of relative comfort, the nature and extent of the problems faced by the poor, the marginalised, and the vulnerable. 1 Understanding, once even partially achieved, creates empathy and a responsibility to advocate for redress. The International Poverty and Health Network (IPHN) was created in December 1997, following a series of conferences organised by the World Health Organisation (WHO). The aim of the network is to “integrate health into poverty eradication policies and strategies, promoting community partnership and intersectoral action, as a means to achieve effective and sustainable results”. 2 It was formed in response to the evidence of the persistent and growing burden of human suffering due to poverty and it invites others to join the endeavour.

Around 1.3 billion people live in absolute, grinding poverty on less than $1 per day despite the overall substantial growth of the world economy which doubled over the 25 years before 1998 to reach $24 trillion. 3 Of the 4 billion people in developing countries nearly 60% lack access to sanitation, and have no access to clean water, and about 20% lack access to health care of any kind; a similar proportion do not have sufficient dietary energy and protein.

Economic disparities both within and between countries have grown and in about 100 countries incomes are lower in real terms than they were a decade or more ago. 4 By 1995 the richest 20% of the world’s population had 82 times the income of the poorest 20%. The world’s 225 richest people have the combined wealth equivalent to the annual income of the poorest 2.5 billion people in the world (47% of the world’s population). 5 At the same time the world is facing a frightening scarcity of essential renewable resources from deforestation, soil erosion, water depletion, declining fish stocks, lost biodiversity, and challenges such as climate change which are likely to impact particularly on poor, vulnerable populations.

Despite the overall dramatic increases in life expectancy which have occurred over the last century, health professionals should be concerned about growing inequalities in health and wealth. 6 The precipitous decline in life expectancy in Eastern Europe, particularly in Russia, is a graphic example of how health may deteriorate as societies face sudden social and economic change accompanied by growing poverty. 7 The gap in life expectancy between selected Western European countries and Russia has widened from about three years for men in 1970 to around 15 years in 1995; the figures for women show a widening from four to 10 years over the same period. 8 This health crisis is centred particularly on adult mortality from chronic diseases and external causes, principally violence. 9 The East Asian recession has been deep and severe, resulting in substantial falls in average per capita income in five countries, most notably in Indonesia, with likely effects on poverty and ill health.

Many African countries have total external debts that are more than 100% of their gross national product. Although there has been progress in cancelling debt, only 22 of the 52 countries needing substantial or total debt reduction will actually see their annual payments reduced after the agreements made at the Cologne summit. 10 Therefore much still remains to be done, including monitoring how the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) propose to implement the debt reduction programme and ensuring that the economic policy reforms they recommend are focused on reducing poverty.

Even among generally prosperous, industrialised nations, in countries including Spain, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and the USA there are many examples of growing socioeconomic inequalities in health over the last 20 years or so. 11 In the UK, there has been a widening of the differential in all cause mortality between social class V (unskilled) and social class I (professional) from a twofold...
difference in 1970–72 to almost a threefold difference in 1991–93. It is a matter of particular concern that the lives of so many children are blighted by poverty and robbed of their physical and mental potential. Even in the USA more than one in four children under the age of 12 have difficulties in obtaining all the food they need.

Ill health and poverty are mutually reinforcing and can generate a vicious cycle of deterioration and suffering. Ill health contributes directly to reduced productivity and in some cases, to loss of employment. When it affects the principal earner in poor families it frequently has severe implications for economically dependent children, and other family members, who may no longer be able to nourish themselves adequately. By definition, poor people have very few reserves and may be forced to sell what assets they have, including land and livestock, or borrow at high interest rates, in order to deal with the immediate crisis precipitated by illness. Each option leaves them more vulnerable, less able to recover their former condition, and in greater danger of moving down the poverty spiral. In contrast, effective and accessible health care can protect the poor from spiralling into worsening economic problems with the onset of illness, and community based health care has the potential to make a major contribution to the building of social capital and to the strengthening of the community’s own coping mechanisms.

In the 20th century development was all too often equated with economic growth, but the link between economic prosperity and health, a key component of human development, is not automatic. A recent World Bank study of the causes of declines in mortality between 1960 and 1990 suggested that gains in income contributed around 20% to male and female adult mortality and under 5 mortality rate reductions. Each of these diminishes opportunity, limits choices and undermines health, whereas health indicators provide a nomic indicators focus primarily on income contributed around 20% to male and female adult mortality and under 5 mortality rate reductions. Each of these diminishes opportunity, limits choices and undermines health, whereas health indicators provide a

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Let’s emphasize fire sprinklers as an injury prevention technology!

EDITOR,—The recent article by Lynne Ward et al1 did a generally excellent job of reviewing the literature on prevention of fire injuries. Perhaps because the keywords did not include “sprinkler”, the authors neglected the tremendous value of automatic fire sprinkler systems in preventing deaths and injuries in house fires. The National Institute of Standards and Technology estimates that while smoke detectors alone can reduce the fire death rate by 52%, sprinklers alone could reduce deaths by 69% and the combination by 82%.

1. Sprinklers protect people without requiring human action after a fire starts, and therefore go a major step beyond smoke detectors. Detectors can alert people to a fire, but fail to protect anyone who cannot easily escape without help. For people who are disabled, the intoxicated—the very people who are at greatest risk of dying once a fire is initiated. Detectors do nothing directly to prevent flashover and unacceptable heat, visibility, and toxic smoke conditions. In contrast, fire sprinklers are designed to effectively extinguish fires and to prevent these life threatening conditions.

Although the great majority of fire deaths occur in residential properties, no epidemiologic research on the impact of sprinklers on morbidity and mortality in private housing has been published. During the years 1985–91, the National Fire Incident Reporting System received reports of 7171 non-arsen...
fears in homes with sprinklers and 126,240 non-arson fires in homes without sprinklers for the same fire departments. Preliminary results of research, which included validation of the outcomes and sprinkler status with the reporting fire departments, by Kay, one of the authors, indicate that the sprinklered homes had no fatal fires and 3.9 non-fatal injury fires per 1000 fires. In contrast, the non-sprinklered homes had 8.0 fatal fires and 36.7 non-fatal injury fires per 1000 fires.

In recent years, some jurisdictions in the United States have mandated sprinkler installation in new single family or multifamily housing. Yet many builders and homeowners are discouraged by myths and misconceptions, including a belief that sprinklers will “go off” by mistake and cause extensive water damage. In fact, sprinklers rarely activate accidentally and they sprinkle only rooms where there is fire. Not only do sprinklers improve life safety conditions by extinguishing a fire soon after onset, sprinkler discharges of 30 gallons/minute cause much less property damage than fire hoses at 300 plus charges of 30 gallons/minute, and of health services supply and access factors. An indicator based on all attendances for injury at A&E departments will not satisfy these criteria. We have argued that, in the context of routinely collected data in England, a reliable indicator is one based on identifying cases of serious long bone fractures admitted to hospital. This indicator may be a useful starting point for the measurement of recent changes in bicycle road safety expenditure, where, like England and Wales, no direct measures of injury severity are routinely collected.

A national computerised data collection system for all A&E departments in Scotland is likely to be expensive. A better use of any additional resources would be to introduce severity coding of injury admissions, and to use an indicator based on serious injury cases to monitor the effect of this and other policy changes.

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Argument for accident and emergency (A&E) collection flawed

EDITOR—In a recent edition of Injury Prevention, Leonard and colleagues argue that the monitoring of recent changes in bicycle road safety policy in Scotland require “accurate measurement to generate robust findings” (p303). Regrettably what they propose, “a national computerised data collection system for all A&E [accident and emergency] departments” (p304), will not meet their specification. This is primarily because there would be many cyclists who do not attend A&E who have injuries of similar anatomical or physiological severity to those that do attend. There is evidence that the probability of attendance at A&E depends on factors other than injury occurrence, including demographic and access factors such as distance from hospital. Equally important is that delivery of A&E services may change within and across providers over time in response to changes in health service policy and practice. If Scotland wants to monitor the impact of its transport policy on injury to bicyclists it needs an indicator which ideally meets the following criteria:

1. The indicator should reflect the occurrence of injury satisfying some case definition of anatomical or physiological damage;
2. The injury cases ascertained should be important in terms of incapacity, impairment, disability, quality of life, cost, and/or threat to life;
3. Cases should be completely ascertained from routinely or easily collected data;
4. The probability of a case being ascertained should be independent of social, and of health services supply and access factors.

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Foam party risks

EDITOR—Foam parties are becoming increasingly popular among young people. A male adolescent aged 16 years tried to leave a party by jumping onto a bus, but he fell and hit his head on a metal bar placed at the edge of the dance floor. He got up but he soon became somnolent and retrograde amnesia occurred. Because of the foam nobody could see the circumstances of the fall and he was taken outside to recover. Consequently his transport to an emergency department was delayed.

At admission a small skin bruise at the occiput was noted. Because of increasing headache and clinical signs of increased intracranial pressure he was referred to our hospital for further treatment the second day after the accident. Computed tomography at admission demonstrated a significant right frontal intracerebral haematoma with perifocal oedema, a small right frontal subdural haemorrhage, and a midline shift to the left (fig 1). He was monitored in the intensive care unit with an epidural intracranial pressure transducer. The initial recovery was uneventful and he was discharged home two weeks after the injury. However, he had lost smell and taste perception and his short term memory remained disturbed at follow up six months later.

Young people should be made aware that party foam sprayed on a dance floor creates a very slippery surface and the potential for accidents may be imperceptible to others when several feet of foam cover the floor. Foam parties can also cause significant chemical keratoconjunctivitis when the foam containing anionic tensioactives comes into contact with their eyes.

We therefore recommend that party foam should be used only when there is adequate supervision of the dance floor. The edges of the floor should be rounded and made of impact absorbing material. Party foam must not be sprayed onto the faces of people dancing.

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