

Summary: Public health policy: fit for purpose?

Tuesday 1st March 2011, 8.30 - 9.45am
Meston Suite, Royal Horseguards Hotel, 2 Whitehall Court, London SW1A 2EJ

Chaired by: **Denis Campbell**, Health Correspondent, Guardian and Observer
Professor Steve Field, Chairman of the Health Inclusion Board, Department of Health
Professor Alan Maryon-Davis, Hon Professor of Public Health, Kings College London
School of Medicine

Professor David Nutt, Professor of Neuropsychopharmacology at Imperial College
and Chair of the Independent Scientific Committee on Drugs

Jackie Schneider, Sustain and the Children's Food Campaign

Brigid Simmonds OBE, Chair of the Sport and Recreation Alliance

At Luther Pendragon's public health breakfast on Tuesday 1st March, our esteemed panel discussed the current Health and Social Care Bill making its way through the legislative process, and the wider public health challenges facing policymakers over the next few decades. The panellists debated whether the Health and Social Care Bill is 'fit for purpose', and whether Andrew Lansley's ambition to 'improve the health of the population, and the health of the poorest fastest' is either laudable or feasible. Wider public health challenges over the long-term discussed include **obesity; brain disorders**, from schizophrenia to Alzheimer's; **alcohol dependency** (and in turn, alcohol pricing) and the public health needs of hard-to-reach **minority groups** such as the homeless.

Members universally agreed on the importance of screening for public health problems, from loss of hearing to cancer. Panellists also agreed that in the future, vaccination programmes will be the key to solving public health crises, and denounced the current vaccination rates; although the value of forcing children to be immunised before starting school proved more controversial, with one panel member stating that there should be no barriers whatsoever to gaining an education.

The new Public Health Responsibility Deals also proved a subject of much contention. Some panel members believed that industry should be brought 'into the fold' to reduce the amount of legislation needed on issues such as food labelling and marketing of confectionery to children; others thought it a cynical ploy by corporate bodies who should have no hand in policy making. One panel member thought that the 'tent should be widened' to include both the alcohol and tobacco industries.

The role of public health professionals was discussed, with the respective merits of GPs and pharmacists debated. One panel member was of the opinion that both groups should receive training on their respective roles, and how they can best work together to produce the best outcomes for patients. The way pharmacies deal with drug addiction was praised, although one panel member raised concerns about the non-medically licensed products available on sale within their premises.

The event ended with a debate on the role of the NHS in public health prevention, with one panel member asserting that it was never within the NHS remit to stop people getting ill.