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THE SSM CONFERENCE ISSUE!



2010 'SocSocMed' Rocked!

Welcome to our special SSM Conference issue! This year, Queen's University Belfast was host to a fantastic conference. The timetable was jam-packed with gems of talks and the plenary speakers gave thought provoking speeches. Word on the street is that the social activities after hours were brilliant too from an excellent conference dinner to bopping into the early hours at Belfast's nightclubs. All in the good name of networking of course!

We have included some feedback from our committee chair as well as perspectives from students who availed of the free places. If you missed the Pembroke Lecture by Professor Johan Machenbach – ***Has English Strategies to Reduce Health Inequalities Failed?*** – then do not fret. You can revisit his talk in print in *Social Science & Medicine*, 2010, vol. 71 (7), pp. 1249-1253.

Our next issue in January 2011 will be dedicated to the spending review and the impact upon Social Medicine. We really need to hear your views, whether you are a post-graduate student or a seasoned professor. The newsletter is a good forum to air opinions and we would really like to help the SSM community to share information on this very important issue. Please email us with any ideas you have.

Enjoy the issue!

Catherine, Noriko and Elizabeth

FROM THE CHAIR

Well Done Belfast!

I still don't know if the committee, when they asked me to become chair elect two years ago, did so deliberately because my year in the chair would coincide with the first time the ASM would return to Belfast since 1963. It was an immense personal pleasure to welcome so many of you to my native city regardless. And what a superb meeting it was. Dermot O'Reilly, ably assisted by Gillian Luke and Sheelagh Connolly, led a local organising team that has set an unenviable standard for those in year's to come (I write this with an acute realisation that we will be hosting the 2012 ASM in London).

We began with the Pemberton lecture, although not before remembering the other giants of public health, in addition to John Pemberton, that we had lost in the past year; Jerry Morris, Donald Acheson, and Mildred Blaxter. To introduce the lecture, Roger Blaney, emeritus professor at Queen's, and a long standing colleague of John Pemberton, gave us an illustrated history of John's life. We are very grateful for this deeply moving account.

We then moved to the lecture proper. It is always helpful to see ourselves as others see us and this year we were helped by Johan Mackenbach, who gave us his assessment of the British government's strategies to tackle health inequalities. His remarkably insightful analysis questioned whether we ever really knew what we were trying to achieve as, if we didn't, it would have been difficult to assess what we needed to achieve it. Clearly, it did not deliver as much as it might (but then where would we be if nothing had been tried). However, pessimistically, or perhaps realistically, he questioned what was actually possible in a democratic society. How much redistribution can an electorate, whose views are shaped by vested interests and the media, often with its own agenda, actually accept?

Our second eponymous lecture, the Cochrane, was given by Mark Petticrew, another returning Northern Irish exile. He took us through the history of the systematic review "from the earliest days to the present time". So often, however, it has been used to answer somewhat discrete questions but why, he asked us, is it not used more to answer some of the really big questions in public policy. The answer he alluded to may be because it doesn't always give politicians the answers they want!

In between the two lectures we had a superb scientific programme, with some truly exceptional papers, not least the three chosen for the final plenary. In a departure from the past, we also had activities led by our extremely enthusiastic Early Career Researchers, including a workshop led by Nick Mays on how to get your research published (I've found that the main reason that articles aren't published is because their authors never submit them but I'm sure there is more to it!).

We were particularly pleased to welcome Walter Ricciardi, president of EUPHA and professor at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Rome. In his speech at the reception he emphasised the importance of the Society, and of UK research in general, to the rest of Europe and to EUPHA in particular. It was a particular personal pleasure to act as a tour guide for Walter and Johan at the weekend, visiting parts of Northern Ireland I last saw 30 years ago (a sort of social geography field trip). Which takes us nicely to the social events, which this year were held in two impressive historic buildings, Stormont, seat of the Northern Irish Assembly, and Belfast City Hall. I want to pay particular tribute to those members who survived the ceildh (noting with amazement that a few even managed to hit Belfast's nightlife later).

In closing, I want to pay tribute again to the local organising committee for such a superb job, as well as to my fellow committee members for their work during the year. In particular I will single out Jenny Mindell, our indefatigable secretary who, I suspect, never quite realised what she was letting herself in for, and Aileen Clarke who stands down as treasurer, just in time to lead us to the 2011 ASM in Warwick. See you all there!

Martin McKee

Next Annual Scientific Meeting is at Warwick

September 14-16th 2011

Details will be circulated to members and put on the [ASM website](#) (with a link from the SSM website) as they become available.



SocSocMed News



AGM Report 2010

The 54th Annual General Meeting of the Society for Social Medicine, held on 6th September 2010 at Queen's University Belfast, was attended by 39 members of the Society. During the meeting, Professor Walter Ricciardi, President of EUPHA and the Society's guest at the ASM, spoke briefly to the meeting about EUPHA and increasing the two-ways links between SSM and EUPHA. AGM minutes and the various reports tabled at the AGM are available on the SSM website at: <http://www.socsocmed.org.uk/forms/agmmin10.pdf> and <http://www.socsocmed.org.uk/forms/HonSec10.pdf>

Our new Honorary Members are:

- Dame Valerie Beral,
- Professor Angela Coulter,
- Sir Liam Donaldson
- Professor Margaret Whitehead

From January 2011, the SSM committee will include:

- Professor Martin White, Newcastle University (Chair-elect, term as chair 2012)
- Professor Mark Gilthorpe, University of Leeds (Honorary Treasurer)
- Dermott O'Reilly (Queen's University Belfast)
- Bernard Rchet (LSHTM)

They join the committee as ordinary members. Dr Gita Mishra has resigned from the committee and her place will be taken by a second early career researcher.

Over the coming few months, the committee will be reviewing both the constitution and subscriptions; we will bring proposals to the Society next year. Members are reminded that it is your responsibility to keep us informed of changes in your contact details. You can do this online via the society's website or by email to the Membership secretary at : socsocmed@gmail.com.

Many people were thanked for their work for SSM, whether on committees or organising the 2009 or 2010 ASM. I should like to record particular thanks to Aileen Clarke who will be standing down as Honorary Treasurer at the end of 2010 after six years, preceded by a year as Honorary Secretary. She is now chairing the organising committee for the 2011 ASM in Warwick, so you can thank her in person when you attend next year's conference.

--Dr Jennifer Mindell, Honorary Secretary

secretary.ssm@gmail.com

<http://www.socsocmed.org.uk/SecMess.htm>

Treasurer's Report

The Society holds approximately £15,000 in its current account. In most years, although our conference aims to break even, it makes a loss of a few thousand pounds, so we also have a deposit account which we keep at a fairly high level (~£50,000) as a cushion against a really dramatically failing conference.

We were luckily well-protected during the financial crisis, but at the moment interest rates are low, and our costs are rising slightly (e.g. for administrative support to run the society). At the same time our income – from our 1,000 members' subscriptions - has remained static. The result is that we made an annual loss over the last three years of between £6,000-£10,000 per year.

These not-yet-gloomy figures prompted us to bring a proposal to raise the subscription rate to the AGM. We have looked at projections for our income and expenditure and think the increase may have to be in the region of £15-£20 per year. We will also be considering how to move over to direct debits rather than standing orders. The subscription changes will need to come to the next Annual General Meeting - so there's no hurry - but we would really value your views on this. Please send me your comments and thoughts.

On a personal note, I will be standing down at the end of 2010 after six years working as Honorary Treasurer. I've been tremendously well-supported by many people, and I can honestly say that I've really enjoyed being treasurer. I am looking forward to continuing membership and links with the society, not least by organising the Society for Social Medicine Annual Scientific Meeting **at the University of Warwick next year 14-16th September 2011** where we will be looking forward to welcoming you.

Aileen Clarke, Honorary Treasurer

Calling Early Career Researchers

Early Career Researchers' sub-committee will have six members from January 2011, with new committee members serving for three years. Anyone who considers themselves to be an early career researcher can apply. (See www.socsocmed.org.uk/ECR/ECR%20Home.htm for more details)

If you are interested, please **email secretary.ssm@gmail.com by 15th November 2010** with the following information:

- *Name
- *Email address
- *Where you work (organisation and town/city)
- *What you would bring to the committee

Looking forward to hearing from you!

SocSocMed News

Free Places Feedback

Every year there are a limited number of free student places at the SSM conference. Recipients write a report on their experiences. Here **Helen Atherton** and **Claire Telford** provide their thoughts about 2010 SocSocMed.

The Belfast Effect

I arrived in Belfast to heavy showers, but undeterred it was time to register and get straight to the invited lunch. Here I mingled with other students, organisers and senior academics. I soon realised that this was going to be a friendly and welcoming conference and within half an hour I had met many people. From lunch it was straight onto the Pemberton Lecture. Hearing about the life and times of John Pemberton was very humbling given all that he achieved over the course of his career. After hearing from Johann Mackenbach on health inequality it was time to move onto the parallel sessions. I stayed in the cancer and geography session, not my particular area but very interesting and I heard about methodologies that I was unfamiliar with. The day finished with a visit to the Stormont Parliament Buildings, which was a real privilege. The canapés were yummy too.

Day two started with more parallel sessions. I was particularly interested in the policy session, and I was not disappointed. The session on new media coverage of NICE was fantastic, and I picked up some tips for the analysis of media stories for my own PhD.

Lunchtime was a brilliant ECR session with Nick Mays, who gave us the inside information on just how to get published, information I am sure to draw on for a long time to come.

One of the best things about this conference is the Tuesday afternoon trip. I was thrilled to get the opportunity to go on the bus tour, and had a lovely (and educational) afternoon sat on the top deck on what was a beautiful day. Afterwards there was time for tea and cake before putting on a dress and heading to dinner. City Hall did not disappoint, and the food was amazing. Usually at conferences it is very difficult to see anything of the local area, but at this conference there was a great balance of sightseeing and academia. Oh and dancing too!

The final day and I felt sad at the prospect of leaving

Belfast. The Cochrane Lecture was particularly pertinent because I am currently working on a suite of reviews. I listened avidly and came away realising how important the reviews are, which was a good morale boost. The conference ended with a series of plenary presentations from the highest scoring abstracts. The most recent journal club in the Department of Primary Care and Public Health here at Imperial was on David Walsh's recently published article on the 'Glasgow Effect' and so I was especially keen to hear his presentation. I have since fed back to my colleagues the various discussion points in his presentation which has furthered our debate on this issue.

The conference was closed with thanks to all involved, and before heading to the airport there was time for a plate of pasta and reflection on three days well spent. I look forward to Warwick next year!

Helen Atherton, Imperial College London

Conference is Key to Good Networking

This year I attended and also presented at SSM. I attended a good range of talks incorporating aspects of disease and policy making. I found that the 15 minute time limit allowed for attendance at a multitude of talks and kept the conference interesting. The lunchtime session on publishing delivered by Nick Mayes was excellent. I picked up some very useful tips from this. I attended the workshop on policy methods and found the level and content of conversation was very high. It was very useful to listen to such distinguished speakers engaging in conversation.

I was very thankful of the opportunity to present on the final day of the conference (although my curfew on the Tuesday night in preparation for this meant I missed out on the partying until 3am in the Belfast nightspots which I believe was undertaken by many of my fellow delegates). I found the audience very attentive to my talk and they asked some useful questions at the conclusion.

The highlight of the social activities for me was the dinner in the City Hall. The surroundings were spectacular and the food was tasty.

In conclusion, I had an enjoyable experience at SSM and feel more knowledgeable, not only in certain areas of research but also in knowing more key researchers throughout the UK and further afield. Many thanks and congratulations to the organisers for such a successful conference.

Claire Telford, Peninsula School of Medicine and Dentistry

EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS

Feedback from Free Student Places

We were also delighted with the very positive feedback provided by some of the recipients of SSM Free Student Places. The friendly and welcoming atmosphere for new researchers featured prominently: as one student said "As an inexperienced presenter myself, I could see myself feeling comfortable enough in the conference environment to present my work, and hope to do so next year". Other students also commented that attending this year's conference had inspired them to come back and/or get more involved in social medicine. For example, one student said:



Table 5 at SSM City Hall Dinner, 7th September 2010, photographed by Claire Telford

"Attending this conference significantly motivated me, a medical geography student, to pursue a career in social medicine research field after my PhD", while another said "This year was my first time at the SSM Conference - for that matter, my first attendance at any public health or epidemiology conference - and the experience was a hugely positive one".

ECR at Belfast

There was a large ECR presence at the SSM annual conference in Belfast, with over eighty self-declared ECRs among the delegates. Alongside the various informal outings to restaurants, pubs and bars, we organised two semi-informal activities – a 'speed meeting session' on the first morning, and a lunchtime workshop with Nick Mays on 'How to publish in leading journals'. Both were well attended and got excellent feedback – for example "Lunchtime was a brilliant ECR session with Nick Mays, who gave us the inside information on just how to get published, information I am sure to draw on for a long time to come." For those who missed out, Nick has kindly made his slides available via the ECR homepage. Given the success of these two events, we hope to organise similar activities at future conferences.

Gig Trail

We are delighted to announce the launch of an **ECR Gig Trail**. We hope this can be a way for ECR's to give each other chances to visit and speak at different institutions – e.g. by organising a lunchtime seminar where a couple of visiting ECRs can talk about their work. Fifteen ECRs have already signed up, but more are very welcome. (continued to the next column)

(from the previous column) If you are interested in organising and/or giving a talk, please sign up via the link on our homepage.

ECR e-list

The gig trail is only one of the activities we hope to organise for SSM ECRs. To join our mailing list and hear about what's going on, please email us on ecr.ssm@gmail.com. You can also get events updates via our facebook page (SSM ECRs – link on ECR homepage), but please join the e-list too - we don't expect to put everything on Facebook.

Any ideas?

If you've any ideas for what we can/should do! The Gig Trail idea came from an ECR at the SSM conference in Belfast and we'll be delighted to get other suggestions.

Email: ecr.ssm@gmail.com

Homepage:

<http://www.socsocmed.org.uk/ECR/ECR%20Home.htm>

Social Medicine in Action

The ECP team managed to get hold of the very busy **Martin McKee**, Professor of European Public Health Science at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine to quiz him on his career in Social Medicine.

Why did you decide to get involved in social medicine?

I began my training in internal medicine in Belfast and was fast tracked into an academic pathway, working mainly on peptide biochemistry. However, I was increasingly unclear how the research I was doing would ever have any significant impact on in the health of the people I was seeing in the clinical part of my work. There I was seeing the diseases associated with multiple deprivation – although this was the 1980s, I was seeing patients with scurvy and beri-beri. It also became clear that I was simply picking up the pieces after the politicians had failed to tackle the determinants of health. The first patient I admitted was a 65 year old tobacco worker, retired one week, with back pain – a secondary from his primary lung cancer. His employers had given him a free supply of cigarettes – so much cheaper than paying a pension. As a registrar in hepatology, I often looked after wards where 90% of the patients had alcohol-related problems. Yet the Northern Irish politicians seemed to find the appalling health of their constituents almost a joke. However, my final decision to move was probably when I realised that I just didn't want to spend my life raising antibodies to obscure peptides in rabbits!

What three pieces of advice would you give to an early stage researcher looking to have a career in social medicine?

You can hear my views on this in a lecture I gave some years ago at the University of Maastricht <http://www.sciencevision.unimaas.nl/Aspher%20Conference.htm>.

However, my three main messages are:

1. See the big picture. Read history, political biographies, the Financial Times and the Economist. Understand the context you are working in.
2. Just do it. Your consultants and professors are paid more than you to take the blame when things go wrong. As long as you are not completely reckless, they should support you when you make mistakes and not just take credit when you succeed
3. Be brave. You will never make a difference in public health if you don't challenge vested in-

terests. Public health is not a career for the faint-hearted.

What area of social medicine do you think most needs to be researched in the next 20 years?

In general, I think we need to find ways that can move upstream to understand and address the fundamental determinants of health, including the build environment and the political climate. However, more specifically, when we looked at this in the run-up to the 2008 Bamako Ministerial Conference on global health research we identified three priorities for increased research in Europe: ageing, migration, and alcohol.

What was your first ever publication about, in 30 words or less?

My first six papers were on clinical medicine. The first described the use of a new thrombolytic agent in hepatic vein thrombosis. My first public health paper was on avoidable mortality, something I am still working on.

What is the publication that you are most proud of and why?

Difficult to choose from a current total of just over 500. I think it must be one of the papers that Dave Leon and I did on alcohol in Russia. These contributed to a major change in the law that were followed, albeit temporarily, by a substantial fall in death rates. Another, with Ellen Nolte, on the poor performance of the US health system was cited widely in the Congressional debates on Obama's reforms and it seems that at least some important people were influenced by it.

What is the publication that you are least proud of and why?

I have always taken the view that my PhD students should publish their research. Some of these papers are unlikely to change the world and I certainly wouldn't count them among my best, but they were important for the researchers in taking a first step on the publication ladder.

If you had to recommend one book (preferably a popular science book, but could also be a text book) for an early stage researcher in social medicine to read what would it be?

Public Health at the Crossroads, by Robert Beaglehole and Ruth Bonita (Cambridge University Press). Robert and Ruth have inspired a generation of public health practitioners. They see the big picture and challenge our complacency.

SocSocMed News

DATES FOR THE DIARY

The Society for Social Medicine and the Health Service Research Network one day conference:

Evaluating market reforms in the English NHS

20 December 2010, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Tavistock Place

This conference will report findings from the Health Reform Evaluation Programme, a programme of research aimed at evaluating the market reforms introduced in 2002. The reform policies include patient choice of provider, 'payment by results', practice-based commissioning and provider diversity.

The focus of the conference is on providing a synthesis of research findings and analysis aimed at informing future policy development. Speakers include Nick Mays, Professor of Health Policy, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine; Anna Dixon, Director of Policy, The Kings Fund; and David Hunter, Professor of Health Policy and Management, Durham University. Discussion will include contributions from policy makers, analysts and researchers. To reserve a place please contact : lorelei.jones@lshtm.ac.uk.

Summer School on Longitudinal and Life Course Research, University of Antwerp 4-8 July 2011, Antwerp Belgium

Jointly organised with the International Centre for Lifecourse Studies, University of Antwerp will run a summer course for PhD students and postdoctoral fellows who are interested in life-course. To apply your place, please visit this link before 1 March 2011: <http://www.ua.ac.be/cello/summerschool>

Short Courses in research methods, University of Bristol (2010-2011)

The School of Social and Community Medicine provides a programme of high quality short courses covering a range of health services research, biostatistics, human genetics, health protection and epidemiological research methods.

They are aimed at university staff and post-graduate students, public health specialists, health-care professionals and members of the pharmaceutical and medical device industry. and student feedback on these courses is excellent.

24-26 Nov. Data management for health research using Microsoft Access
1-3 Dec. Cancer Epidemiology (and more)

For further info: <http://www.epi.bris.ac.uk/shortc/shortc.htm>

EUPHA FREE ONLINE ACCESS

As a SSM member you are also a member of the European Public Health Association (EUPHA). This used to entitle SSM members to free copies of the printed version of the European Journal of Public Health, which were distributed with the Newsletter. However, the Journal (like the newsletter) is now an electronic journal.

As part of your EUPHA membership you are entitled to **FREE ONLINE ACCESS** to the full text of the European Journal of Public Health. In order to gain access to the journal, you have register an account using the subscriber number sent to you in a letter from Oxford University Press (the publisher). Please email secretary.ssm@gmail.com for more details.

HOUSEKEEPING

PLEASE keep your contact details up-to-date. Following-up bounced back emails takes a lot of time, so please let us know as soon as you change any part of your contact information - work address, home address, but most importantly ***email address***.

The easiest way of doing this is to go to SSM website and click on Membership and then Online update.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Hey Big Spender! Spend a little time with us....

We would like to hear about your reaction to the Spending Review.

Please email ideas or suggestions for contributions to:

Dr Catherine Heffernan, hefferc@yahoo.com

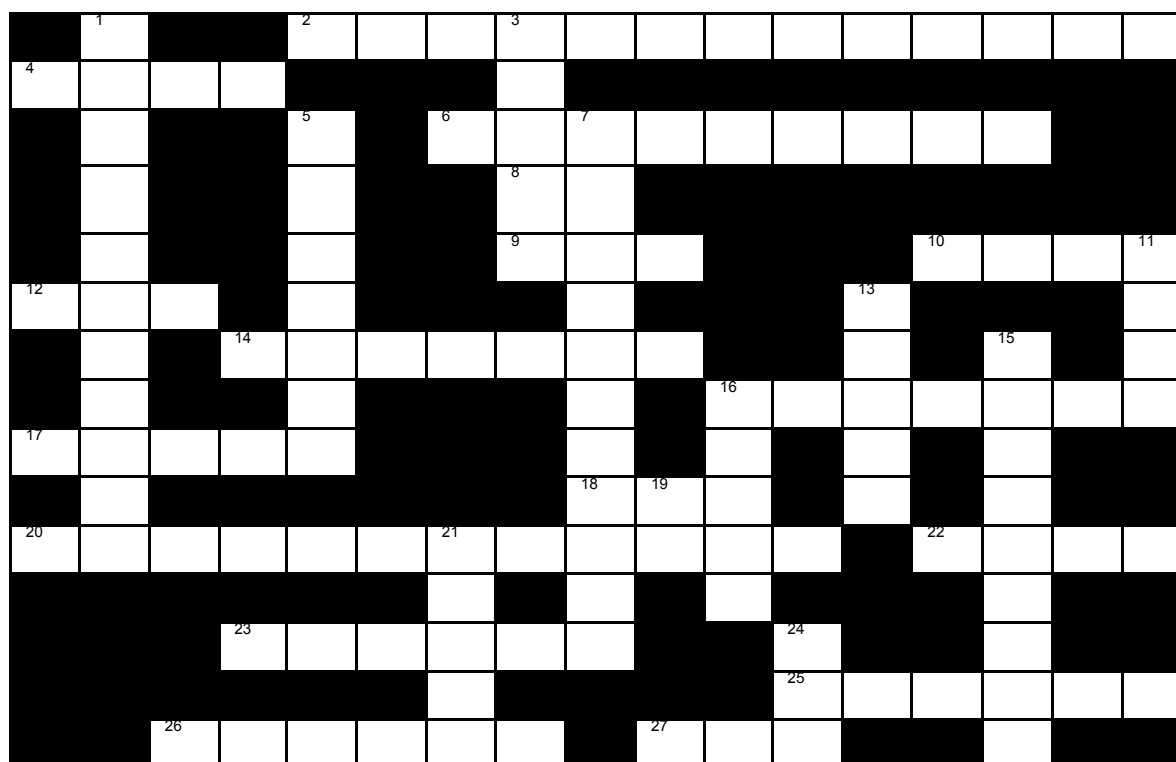
Dr Noriko Cable, n.cable@ucl.ac.uk, or

Dr. Elizabeth Breeze, e.breeze@ucl.ac.uk

Deadline is 31st December 2010

SocSocMed Crossword

TEST YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE!



DOWN

1. You can discard your behaviour and start anew (11).
3. Marx struggled with this (5).
5. Sometimes sick, but always had a role (7).
7. Weber had an ideal type (11).
11. Montague said this was not an objective reality (4).
13. Cooley liked distinguishing the characteristics of this (5).
15. Could be a TV presenter or could be a critic of bureaucratic organisation (9).
16. A form of collective behaviour (5).
19. "So where are you ___?" Question used a lot by supervisors (2).
21. Merton strained to theorise this (5).
24. Application, employment or purpose (3)

ACROSS

2. Here, society is seen as a social system of interrelated systems(13).
4. This could be of significance (4).
6. Postal workers and some criminologists like doing this (9).
8. If at University of Stockholm, this would be your domain (2).
9. Sex and Relationships Education in short (3).
10. A type of review that is good for publication record (4).
12. A form of no 22 across (3).
14. His self was a reflection of others (7).
16. Not sacred (7).
17. He had a sociological imagination (5).
18. Term used by students to say they've done their statistical models (3).
20. Is Britain this? (12)
22. We share these chances or opportunities if in the same social stratum (4).
23. Basic social institution (6).
25. An agent of socialisation (6).
26. Simmel was this in the city (6).
27. Academics dread this every four years (3).

Please send your completed crossword to one of the editors (see page 6 for details) by **January 15th 2010**. All correct crosswords will be entered into a draw and the first one out of the hat gets a book voucher! Solution will be printed in the next issue.

If you think you can do a better crossword, please contact us. We'd love a quiz master!