



**Jon  
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## Health education for today

It is a sad *fact* that, as a profession, we are woefully conservative in the field of public relations. Leaving aside the contentious issue of advertising our services, this lack of imagination is seen particularly in health education. Once we've stuck a few posters about contraception in the antenatal clinic, hidden a mealy-mouthed health warning on cigarette packets and enrolled a few of the RCGP heavies to look winsome on Channel 4, we tend to heave a sigh of relief and get back to chivying the review body. But posters stopped being a persuasive medium when careless talk stopped costing lives, and even television is becoming the mouthpiece of minority community groups rather than the voice of authority.

I heard an interesting news item over Christmas (remember Christmas? Just before the Easter eggs came into the shops). It was alleged that an animal rights group had laced a few thousand turkeys with Paraquat. I don't know how much this affected sales, if at all, and, though I looked hard in the newspapers, I found no mention of a Boxing Day poisoning epidemic. However, the story presumably arose somehow, as did the earlier report that a bomb in Paris, or somewhere, had been placed not by Colonel Gaddafi or the Basque Separatists, but by an animal welfare organisation.

So while the Health Education Council has been pussyfooting around with Superman telling kids not to smoke, others have taken the initiative in more persuasive ways to improve our lifestyle. The message for the 1980s is that if a cause is worth talking about, it's worth terrorising about. You disagree with killing animals? Simple—kill the people who eat them. Against

nuclear bombs? Simply nuke Washington to prove how horrible they are. Elegant! Here truly is a tool we doctors could use effectively to improve the real level of health in our community.

Is smoking bad for your health? Don't put a warning on the packet; put TNT in the cigarette. Worried about teenage alcoholism? It's nothing a few pub-bombs won't cure. Not enough uptake of pertussis vaccine? Simply slip a few non-attenuated viruses in with the Dip-Tet—that'll soon bring the others running. The possibilities are boundless, and the benefits clearly enormous.

We live in an undisciplined society, and all right-thinking people will realise that terror is the only means of preventing the fragmentation of our health, as well as our nation. People do not have the right to be unhealthy.

## The mouths of babes and sucklings

Our oldest has just started school. A poignant moment really—five short years and into the meat-grinder they go. The first symptoms of social coercion appeared on the very first day. It seemed that our nipper was the only one not to have brought a packet of crisps to eat in the playground after lunch. Foolishly, we had thought that a two-course meal would be sufficient. But no—it seems that deep-fried starch with chemical flavourings is considered generally to be an essential part of the growing child's daily fare. We tried giving him raw carrots, which he loves, but this brought derision from his peers. We tried an apple, but he did not even dare take this from his pocket. It's crisps—possibly sweets—or nothing.

We have made some small attempt to promote a sensible diet in our house—not too much fried food, the odd meat-free meal, and particularly the limiting of refined carbohydrates as far as is reasonable. After all, sugar promotes obesity, diabetes, a preference for foods with poor nutritive content, and most of all dental caries and gum disease. Crisps are equally bad for teeth and obesity, and also help to form the little one's first atherosclerotic

plaques. And yet the first dietary lesson they get at school is "Eat crisps every day".

It's going to look pretty odd in the twenty-first century when historians review the present day preoccupation with adding fluoride to everything in sight, brushing teeth every few min-



utes and replacing our molars with lumps of metal or plastic imitations. They are going to wonder why, when we knew quite well that dental decay arose in the nineteenth century as a direct result of the availability of cheap sugar, we spent so little effort in removing the cause.

## Serendipity

A productive day last Thursday. Went to do local radio talk-in on seat-belt legislation. On the way, managed to fix up part-exchange deal on car.

Next day, wife wrote-off car. Family were belted up because had heard me on wireless. Garage agreed to give same price for bits of car as for original working version.

So now have new car and intact wife, children, whereas might have had neither. Sometimes, you just have to say thanks.▪