

July 2007

Society for Social Medicine Newsletter

**51st Annual Scientific Meeting
Joint meeting with IEA Europe
Cork 2007
12-14th September 2007**

If you have not yet registered for this year's ASM you can do so at <http://www.ucc.ie/academic/pubh/ssmiea/registration.html>. Accommodation is being provided in the Brookfield halls of residence and this year's conference dinner is to be held at Oriel House. A wide selection of trips and workshops are being offered on the Thursday afternoon. Further information about all of these can be found on the conference website.

This year's Cochrane Lecture, entitled "Hens' teeth: watering down the evidence base for mass fluoridation and other public health and social interventions", will be delivered by Professor Trevor Sheldon (Department of Health Sciences, University of York).

This year we also have an additional lecture, the IEA Europe John Pemberton lecture, which is being given by Professor Jørn Olsen (Department of Epidemiology, UCLA & IEA President). The title of this lecture is "Recent achievements and challenges in epidemiology".

A timetable of events and details of all the scheduled presentations are included in this mailing. Please direct any enquiries relating to the ASM to Karen Mulcahy (k.mulcahy@ucc.ie; tel. +353 21 4901573).

Retired honorary members of the society are reminded that they can take advantage of a free place at the Annual Scientific Meeting (including registration fee, standard accommodation and a place at the conference dinner). This was a great success last year when many retired members joined in the celebrations of the 50th ASM and we hope to continue this at future meetings.

**SSM one day meeting :
Pathways to obesity:
methods and measurements**

Tuesday 30th October, 2007

Speakers include:

Professor Billie Giles-Corti
(University of Western Australia, Perth)

Dr Brian Salaens
(University of Washington, Seattle)

Professor Mike Batty
(University College, London),

Professor Martin White
(University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne)
Chandos House, Royal Society of Medicine
2 Queen Anne Street, London W1.

Organised by: Steven Cummins (Queen Mary), Tessa Parsons (Institute of Child Health), Sharon Friel (UCL). For registration please contact Sarah Deedat at s.a.deedat@qmul.ac.uk

This will also be the third in the ESRC seminar series Obesity & The Social & Physical Environment.

Website: www.geog.qmul.ac.uk/obesity.

Report of a one-day SSM / SAPC meeting

**Researching Symptoms: Past, Present and
Future, Keele University, 22nd May 2007**

Physical symptoms are very common in the community and are the main reason for contact with primary care. A high proportion of these symptoms have no medical explanation. Such 'unexplained' symptoms are less explored than more specific diseases, and have little focus in public health, despite their large impact on the individual, on healthcare, and on society in general. Classical epidemiology is also difficult to apply to physical symptoms that often run a non-standard recurrent or persistent course without clearly defined end-points. The overall aim of the meeting was to describe the current state and potential developments in the quantitative study of physical symptoms.

There were 28 participants at the meeting, including the six speakers, who covered topics such as the epidemiology of physical symptoms, symptoms in primary care, symptoms and public health, with the afternoon session covering methodological aspects of studying symptoms. Professor Wessely talked about the different symptom syndromes, and how they may be sociological phenomena or illnesses of modern life. Professor Dowrick went on to describe how unexplained symptoms are a common reason for frequent attendance in primary care, and how the many methods of symptom classification are not always helpful. Dr Picavet illustrated why symptom-based conditions are not seen as a priority in public health, as they are not linked to specific diseases, are not contagious and are not life-threatening, despite the fact that many are long term problems with high impact on the individual. In the afternoon, a number of methodological issues were raised. Dr Mishra

told how new longitudinal statistical methods can be used to study recurrent and persistent problems, Dr Risdale revealed problems encountered in complex intervention trials and Dr Burton described a method using diaries to study symptoms. The active discussion covered topics such as how to define a case in symptoms research, and the specificity of interventions for symptom-based conditions.

This was the first one-day meeting that was co-organised between the Society for Social Medicine and the Society for Academic Primary Care. This approach paid dividends, as there were lively debates on both the epidemiological, methodological and social aspects of researching symptoms, and on the clinical implications of research findings in primary care. We hope that this will be the first of many meetings co-organised between these societies.

Kate Dunn (for SSM) and Alison Elliott (for SAPC)

SSM Newsletter

If you have any contributions to the newsletter please send them to: Laurence Moore, Cardiff Institute of Society, Health and Ethics, 53, Park Place, Cardiff CF10 3AT. Email:

MooreL1@cf.ac.uk

New committee members

With Roger Harrison and Laurence Moore both due to finish their three year terms on the Committee at the end of this year, there were two vacancies for 2008. Since there were also two nominations, there was no need for an election. Nevertheless, the details of the two new Committee members, Steve Cummins and Ivan Perry, are given below. Steve and Ivan have both been co-opted members of the Committee this year, and it is disappointing that there were no nominations from the wider membership to bring 'new blood' to the Committee. Whilst we are fortunate that Steve and Ivan will continue to serve the Committee, with Steve taking over as Newsletter Editor in January, members are encouraged to consider putting themselves forward for election next year, since it would be good to have an election and good to have some new faces on the Committee!

Dr Steven Cummins

A member of the Society since a postgraduate student, Steven is currently MRC Fellow based at Queen Mary, University of London. He is a researcher with training in geography and epidemiology and will become NIHR Fellow and Senior Lecturer at Queen Mary from October 2007.

Steven's main research interests are neighbourhood and contextual effects on health, the socio-environmental determinants of poor diet and physical activity, the design and evaluation of community social and policy interventions for health. Steven has worked for, and on behalf of, a number of academic and non-academic groups. He has also worked for, or contributed to, a number of governmental and third sector working groups, most recently the Heart & Stroke Foundation of Canada and the Institute for Public

Policy Research. He hopes to bring the experience gained from working for these various groups and committees to the society and is particularly interested in fostering relations with outside agencies that enable research to be translated into action.

Dr Ivan Perry

Ivan Perry trained in Epidemiology at the LSHTM (MSc Epidemiology 1990) and completed his PhD with Prof Gerry Shaper at the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine. He was previously, Senior Lecturer in Epidemiology/ Assistant Director of the UK Small Area Health Statistics Unit (SAHSU) at Imperial College School of Medicine, London and is currently Professor of Public Health at University College Cork. Ivan has extensive experience of both population health and health services research. His methodological focus is primarily quantitative with considerable experience in the design and conduct of cohort and case control studies and RCT's. He has led the development of a flourishing, multi-disciplinary Department of Epidemiology & Public Health with a 4-year undergraduate BSc in Public Health, Masters Programmes in Health Promotion and Occupational Health and doctoral students in CVD and suicide epidemiology, health services research and applied public health research. The Department of Epidemiology & Public Health in UCC has established a national public health advocacy profile with a particular focus on the role of dietary salt intake in cardiovascular disease and tobacco control. Ivan Perry is the Foundation Director of Ireland's National Self Harm Registry, Chairman of the Research Institute for a Tobacco Free Society and Vice-Chair of Cork's Northside Community Health Development project. He is a co-Principal Investigator on a national PhD Scholar Programme in Health Services Research funded by the Irish Health Research Board in 2007 and on SLAN-07 a national health and lifestyle survey.

Workshop

Epidemiology: an introduction to concepts, theories, principles and methods.

10th to 14th December 2007

This introductory course on the concepts, principles and methods of epidemiology will be based upon the textbook: Concepts of Epidemiology. Oxford University Press, 2002, pp317. The book won first prize in the public health section of the prestigious British Medical Association book awards in 2003. The course will aim to cover in one week most of the material in the book, bringing participants to the level of introductory epidemiology in Masters level courses in public health. The teaching will comprise of lectures (maximum three hours per day), small group exercises, and self learning through tackling test papers (with answers discussed by the whole group). We anticipate 10-20 students with a maximum of 30. For details see: <http://www.lifelong.ed.ac.uk/cpd/courses/medicine?Course=K1265>.

Cost: £750 inclusive of the book, refreshments, lunch, the course dinner on Thursday and a set of power point slides. Other meals and accommodation are not included.

Who is this course for?

The course is suited to those who want to lay a sound foundation to their knowledge of epidemiology, particularly as it relates to public health practice, policy and research. The course is most suited to people in the health professions e.g. nurses, doctors, health promoters, health policy makers and health researchers. Social sciences, statistics and health management colleagues have also found the course useful. A multidisciplinary gathering is expected.

Course leaders: Professor Raj Bhopal CBE,
Dr Snorri Rafnsson.