

MANCHESTER MEDICAL SCHOOL

Public Health Forum

A symposium of the Public Health Forum, of the Manchester Medical Society, was held on **Thursday 23rd November 2006** at **2.00 pm** at the **Manchester Dental Education Centre**. (MANDEC) University of Manchester entitled “Cardiovascular epidemiology and prevention – lessons from Finland and other exotic places”.

Dr C Birt, the President, thanked members and guests for attending and proceeded to introduce the speakers as follows: -

Dr Ffion Lloyd-Williams

(Research Programme Manager, Heart of Mersey &
Research Fellow, University of Liverpool)

“Finns can only get better – the North Karelia experience”

This talk focussed on the successful North Karelia coronary heart disease prevention programme in Finland and how the programme has led the way in community-based interventions for more than 30 years. It showed that in the early 1970s CHD rates in Finland were one of the highest in Europe, and how this led to an integrated programme of prevention and treatment being started in 1972 in North Karelia and being extended to the rest of Finland five years later. The presentation described the key principles of the programme which include a comprehensive programme at national, regional, community, and individual levels; a medical framework covering primary prevention and a population perspective; and a social and behavioural framework. Outcomes of the programme were described, including data showing how CHD deaths have dropped by 73% in North Karelia as a result of the intervention.

Mr Robin Ireland

(Chief Executive, Heart of Mersey)

“Something better change – CHD prevention in Merseyside”

Mr Ireland outlined the background to the Heart of Mersey intervention in Greater Merseyside. He showed how the UK’s rates of CHD deaths were very high in comparison to countries such as Italy, Sweden, the Netherlands and Canada and that 80% of UK CHD deaths may be considered as environmental and preventable therefore. Slides showed that it is difficult for individuals to make behaviour changes to reduce their risk from heart disease, whereas a strategic approach can make environmental changes which can impact on all the population. The main cause for the reduction in CHD death rates in England & Wales in recent years is

lifestyle changes (such as a reduction in smoking) not improved treatments (although these are also important). Heart of Mersey (HoM) was formed as CHD rates are even higher in Greater Merseyside (and in the North West as a whole) than the English average and to develop a collective strategic response to reducing heart disease. In its three-year history HoM has developed as an advocacy organisation, lobbying for change to improve diets and for smoke free legislation.

Ms Modi Mwatsama

(Heart of Mersey)

“Transforming tastes to combat CHD”

Ms Mwatsama’s talk outlined some of the work Heart of Mersey is doing to promote healthier diets through the Food and Health Strategy for Greater Merseyside. Among the initiatives she highlighted were:

- Lobbying & advocacy at national and European level to bring about changes to the Common Agricultural Policy which support health, including allowing milk subsidies for school aged children to pay for low fat milk. She reported that Heart of Mersey had been addressing these issues through a variety of means including producing and disseminating briefing statements, supporting MPs to table parliamentary questions, and responding to relevant consultations.
- HoM is also promoting the establishment of healthier environment through the Greater Merseyside Food Charter Award for food service establishments and the setting up of a Merseyside Food Policy Forum to support trusts to address the local and healthy food agenda.
- As part of its work to developing the public health evidence base - Modi reported that HoM had recently produced a report and recommendations on policy and practices around food provision in the pre-school sector in Cheshire & Merseyside - which had been widely disseminated locally and nationally.

Ms Sue West

(Heart of Mersey)

“Smokefree – the fag end of the affair”

This talk outlined details of comprehensive smoke free legislation for England which will come into force on 1 July 2007, and Merseyside’s key role in driving this forward. The presentation also emphasised the need to create awareness among businesses, in particular, of their statutory obligations under the Health Act which embodies these regulations, and outlined proposals for a high profile multi-media communications campaign for the North West, echoing the proposed national campaign by the Department of Health.

Each speaker was allocated 20 minutes and all four speakers received a vote of thanks from a very attentive audience.

A coffee break was then followed by a second lecture from one of the earlier speakers as follows:-

Ms Modi Mwatsama
(Heart of Mersey)
“Super Skim Kim v. the World!”

This presentation outlined the development, implementation and evaluation of a mixed-media social marketing campaign to promote the benefits of consuming low fat dairy products to parents and children. The Greater Merseyside campaign ran in October 2006. Delegates were informed that 95% of children in the UK are consuming excess saturated fat while average consumption levels are 40% higher than the maximum recommended levels. The campaign focused on dairy products because they are the biggest single source of saturated fat in children, accounting for 27% of intakes in primary school aged children. The presentation was jointly delivered by Lucy Reynolds from Staley Peters - the design and PR agency which developed the design concepts, and Modi Mwatsama from Heart of Mersey.

The final part of the meeting took the form of a **debate** entitled:-

**“How much should the state interfere in
seeking to influence the lifestyles of our children?”**

Mr Ireland introduced the discussion by describing some of the efforts made by global food producers to encourage us to choose their products which all too often are energy dense, with excessive levels of fat, sugar and salt. This of course not only impacts on levels of CHD, but also on obesity, Type 2 diabetes and certain cancers. The meeting discussed how the audience felt that the state should intervene to counter this influence and focused on school-based initiatives in particular. The debate highlighted that all present believed that the state does indeed have a role to play in influencing the lifestyles of our children.

Professor Dick Heller gave a summation of the afternoon lectures which brought the afternoon to a close.