



How do we talk about health?

Communicating health and creating supportive environments

Webinar: Tuesday 29th March 2022, 6pm

Event Summary

Hosts [Patricia Owen](#), President, Institute of Health Promotion and Education (IHPE.)

[Laura Binnie](#), Head of School of Health Sciences, Robert Gordon University (RGU.)

Chair [Robin Lansman](#), IHPE Trustee

Panel [Linda Hindle](#), Lead for Allied Health Professions (AHPs) and Emergency Services, Office for Health Improvement and Disparities.

[Fiona MacDonald](#), Organisational Lead, Public Health Workforce Development, Public Health Scotland.

[Sylvia Cheater MBE](#), IHPE Trustee and Past President

[Denise Penny](#), Academic Lead, Public Health and Health Promotion, RGU.

There was a warm welcome from both hosts, with alignment of values and partnership in shared missions to improve public health. There is a strong drive to connect and unite in collaboration with people from diverse backgrounds to promote health across generations and societies worldwide. This was also evident from the range of attendees with representation from a wide range of organisations, universities, and professions.

There were 256 participants registered for the live event and link to the recording, of which the majority were UK-based. Other countries represented included Canada, Ireland, Mexico, the Netherlands, and USA.

The panel shared their passions for health promotion, all originating from observations during work in their respective areas of health, including dietetics, nursing, and dental health. It was clear to see that over many years of shared experience, their passions and drives are unwavering.

In reflecting on what health means to them, the panel shared some helpful insights, including the following definition:

'Health is not the absence of disease. It includes all physical and mental health, and it is important to understand that there is an optimal level of health for different people at different stages of their life course. There is not one descriptor of health.' Sylvia Cheater MBE

There was a moving observation, recognising our interdependence and that we all live and work in communities:

'Public health is owned by every one of us: professionals, community, and the public....and everyone has something to contribute' Fiona MacDonald

Fiona went on to say how the impact of the Covid pandemic has made it clearer that *'mental health, including wellbeing and resilience, is absolutely essential to all that we do and needs to be strengthened alongside our physical health.'*

Resilience was discussed as the 'ability to adapt to change' and 'bounce back,' and is vital at the current time, with so much around us that is impacting our health.

There has been much learning from the pandemic, with our need for social connectedness for emotional wellbeing particularly in the spotlight. Additional determinants of health offered included the sense of being valued and having a purpose in life through employment, social connections, life-long learning and giving back, for example by engaging in voluntary work.

The importance of recognising the changing nature of health from day to day for individuals, together with the value of identifying strengths and assets on which to build was also discussed as the basis for empowering people to find solutions within their means and values.

The role of community was a recurrent theme throughout the discussion, with one example being the hospital environment, with the contribution of family and friends to the health journey of patients, hindered by pandemic-related visiting restrictions. Interventions from AHPs such as art and music therapists were also discussed, with emphasis on the importance of timing and a patient-centred approach to identify what is most likely to be helpful, and when.

Intergenerational issues were considered, with the concerns of young people about climate change tending to bring about greater passion for maintaining the health of the planet than their own health, among this age group. The value of cross-generational projects such as the visits of young children to care home was recognised and the impact of adverse childhood experiences on health outcomes.

There was a sense of shared positivity and optimism in concluding that we have entered a golden period for health promotion, with the realisation that medicine is not always the answer, but rather what is happening within communities. Additional silver-linings of the Covid pandemic were recognised, including health in workplaces, and that the support of staff wellbeing has improved, due to the development of stronger relationships between colleagues and within teams brought about by the challenges faced, and greater recognition of the need for supportive environments in the workplace.

The benefit of the digital age was highlighted, with data identifying areas of greatest need and enabling more efficient targeting of resources. The growing role of [AHPs](#) in health promotion was acknowledged, with a collective ambition across the health and social care sectors to strengthen connections, build on community assets, increase networking, and further develop leadership roles.

With participants engaged in the webinar through the chat function, it is clear the event was helpful in developing some of the above objectives, sharing resources and producing a 'thought-provoking' experience with many ideas and connections to take forward.

Key Points:

1. The ongoing, vital need to address **inequalities** as root causes of poor health was a frequent theme throughout the webinar.
2. The importance of building **resilience in communities** as vital to the changing times in which we live and with **everyone** playing their part in public health.
3. There is potential benefit to be gained from the provision of training in **communication skills** to enable effective health interventions by **all** public-facing workers as part of their **daily work**, contributing to a **360-degree approach** to support and encourage universal health-promoting behaviour.
4. The importance of using **inclusive language**, in place of potentially divisive terminology such as 'old' or 'out of work.'
5. **Young people** are concerned about climate change and may engage with health interventions more readily if the link between individual and planetary health is communicated.
6. Health needs to be a priority across **all** policy areas, including housing, transport, the workplace, and criminal justice system, with collaborative **partnerships and networking** encouraged and strong advocacy from those working in health.
7. **Health promoting settings** should be promoted including schools, hospitals, pharmacies, and prisons. It is critical to consider the health needs of the **entire workforce** within such settings, involving administrative, cleaning and catering staff, which then supports conducive environments for health benefits for all.
8. **Peer support** services as a new and developing area, especially within mental health.
9. The further development of **leadership skills** to drive initiatives forward is needed, especially with the developing roles of AHPs.
10. Meeting people where they are, **listening to what matters** to them and what is likely to make a difference, '**at the right time,**' is important to ensure equitable reach of interventions.

And finally, the health of one country's population is not independent of the wider world, and we need to look further to empower communities worldwide, in endeavours such as vaccination programmes, as we enter this crucial phase in public and planetary health.

Resources shared by participants:

IHPE Position Statements

Topics include Health Promotion, Mindfulness and Air Pollution

<https://ihpe.org.uk/resources/position-papers/>

British Medical Journal Rapid Responses and Letters

Topics include Inequalities, Health Promoting Schools, Ageism, Food Poverty.

<https://ihpe.org.uk/bmj-rapid-responses/>

IHPE Newsletter

Six editions are produced each year covering UK and international issues.

<https://ihpe.org.uk/resources/newsletter/>

Book

Baybutt M, Kokko S, editors. A handbook on settings-based health promotion. New York: Springer, 2022 (in press.)

Other projects and documents

Resource hub for AHPs working towards environmental sustainability.

[The greener AHP](#)

Research-based organisation supporting effective communication on social issues.

[Frameworks Institute March 2022](#)

AHP strategic framework for public health.

[AHP Four nations strategy](#)

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