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President's message

Who do we influence?

This first issue of *The European Health Psychologist*, developed from EHPS's newsletter, coincides with the launch of *Health Psychology Review*, EHPS's new review journal and the 20th anniversary of EHPS's internationally acclaimed *Psychology and Health*. These publications reflect the importance we attach to disseminating high quality research and fostering research activity and collaborations throughout the world. The publications report theoretical and methodological developments, synthesise evidence in particular areas and inform readers about opportunities for training, discussion and debate.

Health psychologists have a good record of conducting and disseminating good scientific research based on robust methods and informed by relevant theory. They also recognise the importance of translating the results of that research into policy and practice. This record is eloquently reflected in the position papers in this issue of *The European Health Psychologist*. Most health psychologists conduct their research in order to improve public and patient health, and we can involve ourselves even further with the process of working with those who can potentially use our evidence to change health policies and the delivery of health services. We need to find ways of making it easier for policy makers to access and engage with our work.

What are some of the issues?

- Scientists stress what they don't know; this is not helpful in influencing policy. We need to also stress what we do know!
- Scientists study problems; policy makers like solutions. We need to stress what we can do, and the problems we have solved, as well as outlining current challenges.
- Health psychologists draw on a plethora of theories and models, many with overlapping constructs with obscure names. We are in danger of confusing with unnecessary complexity and complications of both concepts and language.
- Effective science is cumulative; more could be done to build on existing work within and beyond health psychology, and to communicate fewer solid bodies of evidence rather than a multitude of approaches, study findings and theories. The more we "sing from the same hymn sheet", the more others may listen!
- We are not always clear about our "psychological currency"; economists have money - we have behaviour and well-being.

Michael Frese, the President of the International Association of Applied Psychologists, has made the point that other disciplines have more impact than us on policy e.g. economists, biomedical scientists, sociologists, theologians. Addressing a symposium of the European Congress of Psychology, he suggested four strategies to increase our influence:

1. Work to influence other influential disciplines such as economics (as Daniel Kahneman effectively did).
2. Have more psychologists in public office, although this requires political skills that are rare, and rarely taught to applied psychologists.
3. Engage in political activism e.g. via Non-Governmental Organisations (see Stout, *American Psychologist*, 2004).
4. Establish a Behaviour Expert Council (similar to the Economic Expert Council) to give advice, even when it is not asked for.

What are your views? How can we make progress in translating the evidence we produce from the pages of journals into health care, communities and society at all levels? *The European Health Psychologist* would welcome your contribution to this discussion. Please send your submissions to the Editor: ilgt1@comcast.net.

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