

# Speaker's corner

## Modulated release of health risk information to the general public with the use of mnemonics

The general public is overwhelmed by health risk information, as they are constantly being told about things that are not good for health. Even worse, these things are on a rapidly growing list. For example, recent health headlines in some leading newspapers read: Scars May Be Cancer Predictor, Persistent Heartburn Is a Cancer Warning Sign, High Fiber Diets Don't Cut Colon Cancer, and there are many other similar ones.<sup>1</sup> The end result is that people will do nothing to improve their health because they are overwhelmed and do not know where to start. Health advice should not be dumped all at once to the general public but, instead, should be released in modulation. Information needs to be prioritised and disseminated in stages.

One example of health risk information that has been prioritised and made suitable for modulated release is found in chapter 4 of World Health Report 2002.<sup>2</sup> This chapter quantifies major risks to health and describes leading risk factors. For developed countries, the leading risk factors for chronic diseases are: tobacco, high blood pressure, alcohol, cholesterol, overweight, low fruit and vegetables, and physical inactivity. The four major chronic diseases in terms of disability adjusted life years (DALYs) are: cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases, and neuropsychiatric disorders.<sup>2</sup> All this information can be disseminated in the first step in modulated release, perhaps with the use of mnemonics to assist memory as follows:

To promote one's health, the first line of defence is to play SAFE (that is, smoking, alcohol, food, and exercise). Try to refrain from smoking, drink alcohol in moderation, maintain a balanced diet, and be physically active. If the first line of defence fails, then call a COP (that is, cholesterol, obesity, pressure) to check it out. Go for annual medical examinations and make sure you do not have high blood cholesterol, obesity, and high blood pressure. If the second line of defence also fails, then beware of HARM (that is, heart disease, abnormal growth, respiratory disease, and mental disorder) to your health. You should look for signs and symptoms of heart disease, cancer, lung disease and mental disorder, and go for early treatment.

This first step using "SAFE-COP-HARM", followed by similar strategies for other lower priority health risk information, can be an effective way to summarise and prioritise health risk information for modulated release.

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### REFERENCES

- 1 **Harvard University.** Health Insight—take charge of health information. <http://www.health-insight.harvard.edu/> (accessed 24 Jan 2004).
- 2 **WHO.** The world health report 2002. Geneva: World Health Organisation, 2002. <http://www.who.int/whr/2002/en/> (accessed on 24 Jan 2004).

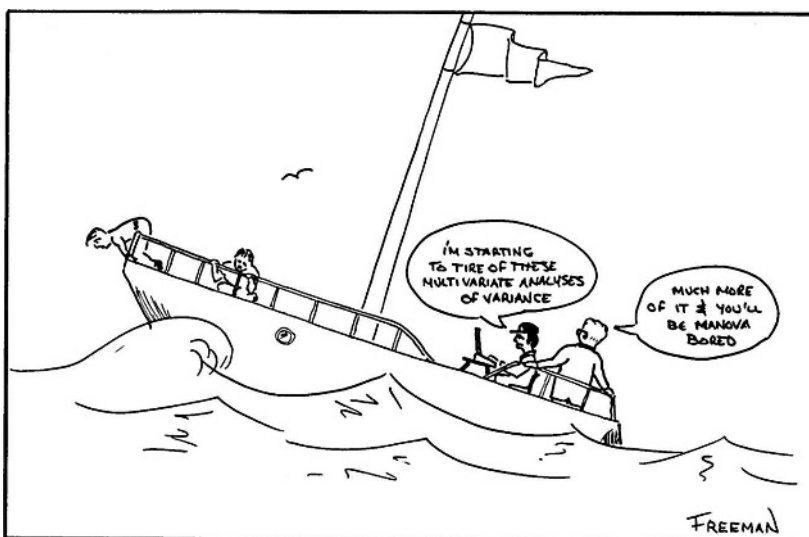
## THE JECH GALLERY

### Analysis of sea sickness data

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ANALYSIS of SEA SICKNESS DATA