

# Inform

number five

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## Mental Health Promotion

A one day meeting aimed at raising and considering the issue of suicide in Northern Ireland was held on 30 April 1999 to contribute to the development of a strategy action plan on mental health.

Representatives from education, youth work, social services, psychiatry, psychology, public health, the health and mental health services, health promotion, research, general practice and the voluntary and community sectors were brought together to identify and discuss issues which should be prioritised for attention in a strategy.

The outcomes of this meeting, together with those of the two day consultation meeting held in February will inform the development of the strategy.

The Task Force on Mental Health Promotion, chaired by the Agency's Chief Executive Dr Brian Gaffney, met in May to prepare a draft document and recommendations for the minister.

# Physical activity campaign leaps into action

The public information campaign on physical activity was launched to great media interest on 2 June 1999 at Malone House in Belfast.

Research has shown that most people in Northern Ireland do not take enough physical activity to benefit their health. The main objective of this campaign is to encourage more people to become more active, more often. The main message is that just 30 minutes activity on most days of the week will benefit our health.

The campaign, called 'Get a life, get active' will run during June on television and billboards throughout Northern

Ireland. Posters and leaflets have also been produced offering more detailed information for the public.

A Cash Grant Scheme which forms part of the campaign has proved very successful. More than 200 community and voluntary groups applied for funding to organise activities which encourage and support people in the community to be more active.

Grants ranging from £50 to £250 have been offered to 79 groups, including multi-ethnic and disabled groups, for a wide range of physical activities which will be organised over the summer months.



**Stepping out for health:** Pictured at the physical activity campaign launch are, from left, Dr Brian Gaffney, Chief Executive of the Health Promotion Agency, Mr John McFall MP, Health and Social Services Minister and Mr Douglas Smyth, Chairman of the Agency.

## Short course training

The Agency's 98/99 short course training and professional development programme which finished in May, proved so successful that many of the courses on offer were oversubscribed.

The Agency has, however, created a waiting list for some of the more popular courses and would hope to repeat them again in the 99/2000 programme.

Approximately 2,500 copies of the short course training prospectus for 1999/2000 will be distributed throughout all sectors in Northern Ireland towards the end of August. It will also be posted on the Agency's Website.

Anyone who is considering applying for continuing or post-graduate education related to health promotion should make direct contact with the colleges or universities to register for the next academic intake.

The Agency, in association with the various academic institutions, will again offer free-standing modules from some of these courses to provide 'tasters' for those who are hesitant about making a longer-term commitment.

## Promoting Health through Community Development - assessing training needs

The Agency recently published a report on the training and education needs of key professionals involved in community development and health work in the Health and Social Services in Northern Ireland.

While a range of research initiatives were being carried out in relation to community development and health, the Agency recognised a gap in information available on current knowledge and training needs of particular health professionals in Health and Social Services Trusts.

The findings highlight the confusion which exists in relation to definitions, roles and perceptions about the community development approach to promoting health.

The majority of participants in the study had not received training in community development and health in the pre or post-qualifying stages of their education.

While many participants in the study demonstrated a familiarity with the concept of this approach, their willingness to use it was hindered by busy work schedules and a perceived lack of support structures, coupled with a fear of arousing community expectations.

*For further information about this research contact Breda Teahan at the Agency. Telephone: (01232) 311611 or E-mail: b.teahan@hpani.org.uk*

# Research, information and analysis

## Sexual health campaign evaluation

An evaluation of the Agency's sexual health public information campaign using 'convenience advertising' was completed in March. It assessed the campaign's impact on the target audience of 18 to 35 year olds, and obtained the views of health professionals working in sexual health and health promotion.

### 18 to 35 year olds

A total of 588 people aged 18 to 35 years were interviewed in 30 entertainment venues, randomly selected from those participating in the campaign. The main findings include:

- Nine out of ten respondents were currently or had been sexually active in the 12 months prior to the survey. 50% of the respondents who were/had been sexually active had one sexual partner, 17% had two partners, 30% had three or more partners and the remainder had no sexual partners.
  - 72% were aware of either a safer sex or HIV public information campaign. Without prompting, 65% of respondents aware of a safer sex or HIV campaign had seen a poster in toilets or had seen the campaign in a pub or nightclub. On prompting this figure rose to 80%.
  - 88% of those aware of this campaign, without prompting, said the posters encouraged people to use condoms as a precaution against sexually transmitted infections or diseases (STIs/STDs).
- Other comments included: information about

STIs, available services, advice against having casual sex and the risk involved in having unprotected sex.

- When shown the campaign posters, 79% of all respondents recognised them.
- Six out of ten respondents said as a direct result of the posters they were better informed about safer sex and more likely to practice safer sex; 62% said they were better informed about STIs and 56% said they were more likely to use condoms.
- 90% of respondents found the posters eye catching, easy to understand (90%), and thought locating them in the toilet areas of entertainment venues was a good idea (86%).

### Health professionals

In-depth interviews were conducted with 10 health professionals whose work involves sexual health promotion. A postal questionnaire, also sent to health professionals working in sexual health promotion, helped quantify some of the responses from the in-depth interviews.

- Respondents were generally very positive about the campaign. They considered the advantages of convenience advertising to include: privacy to read information; ability to target 18 to 35 year olds; posters encourage young people to purchase condoms from vending machines in the toilet areas of the venues and the posters are eye catching with not too much text and therefore more likely to be read.

# Public information campaigns

## Communicating health awards

The Health Promotion Agency's public information campaign on nutrition 'Eat Well to Keep Well' has been highly commended at the prestigious Association of Healthcare Communicators (AHC) Awards in May.

The awards recognise excellence in health service publications aimed at both staff and the public.

The Agency also achieved recognition in four other categories. Its journal 'Promoting Health' was shortlisted for Internal Publication of the Year, Best Design and Best Article and the public information campaign on folic acid was shortlisted for best campaign. Each nomination is judged on the resources devoted to it and value for money is an important consideration.



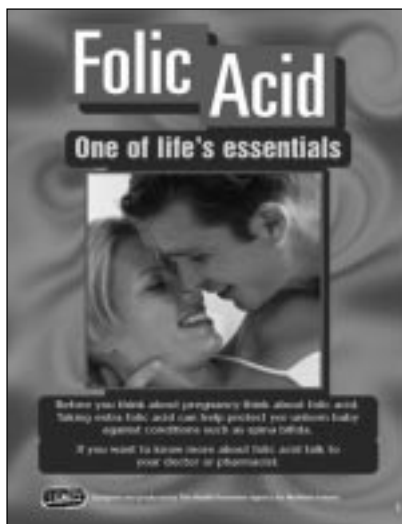
## Folic acid campaign evaluation

### General public

The Agency's public information campaign to promote the benefits of folic acid evaluated very positively. In total, 1,000 adults were interviewed. This represented a response rate of 66.2%.

A similar survey conducted in 1996 allowed for pre and post-campaign comparisons to be made. Some of the main findings are detailed below.

- In the pre-campaign survey less than half the respondents (45%) had heard of folic acid, this increased to almost three quarters (73%) following the campaign. Awareness was highest among women (85%) and those aged 25 to 44 years (84%).
- The main source of awareness of folic acid was television advertising, mentioned by 48% of respondents, increasing to 70% on prompting.
- Significant increases were found in knowledge about the benefits of folic acid and when it should be taken. For example, the percentage of respondents who agreed that 'folic acid is more effective in preventing abnormalities such as spina bifida if taken before becoming pregnant and during the first few weeks' increased from 60% to 83% following the campaign.
- The percentage of respondents who agreed with the statement 'pregnant women do not usually need to take folic acid after the 13th week of pregnancy' increased from 28% to 83%.
- The percentage who agreed that 'there are no harmful side effects to women taking folic acid supplements even if they do not become pregnant' increased from 44% to 84% following the campaign.



### Health professionals

Following the campaign a telephone survey of practice nurses was carried out, as the pre-campaign research had identified them as having the greatest information needs in relation to folic acid. Some of the main survey findings are outlined below.

- The most common issues on which practice nurses gave advice to women aged 16 - 44 years, both pre and post-campaign, were smoking and diet. The proportion spontaneously mentioning folic acid increased from 13% to 25% following the campaign. The proportion who spontaneously mentioned giving folic acid advice to women planning a pregnancy increased from 70% to 93%.
- When asked 'which dietary supplement, if any, you would recommend to pregnant women or women planning to become pregnant?' 90% of respondents said folic acid compared to 77% in the pre-campaign survey.

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## Strategy implementation research

Results are now available from research, commissioned by the Agency, to inform the implementation of the Northern Ireland Food and Nutrition Strategy.

- The findings from the survey of more than 1,100 people aged 16 years and over indicated that cost was the most important issue taken into account when deciding what to buy when shopping for food.
- Cost and special offers were identified by 69% and 61% of the sample respectively. Other factors identified were habit (49%) and prior experience (43%). Health came fifth in order of mention (39%) as a deciding factor when shopping for food.
- Respondents from the higher socioeconomic groups and those aged 50 - 64 years were more likely to specify health as an important issue, while cost was a much

more important issue for those in lower socioeconomic groups and those aged between 16 and 24 years.

- Respondents highlighted confusion (28%), concern about the affordability of healthier food choices (24%), and lack of willpower (23%) as the major difficulties faced in trying to adopt healthier eating patterns.

Lower prices for healthy products was identified as the factor which would be most helpful to those who wanted to adopt healthier eating habits.

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## Drugs focus groups

Qualitative research is currently being conducted with 18 to 30 year olds to find out about their attitudes and information needs in relation to drugs. Ten focus group discussions will be carried out across Northern Ireland and the findings will be featured in a future issue of **Inform**.

## Nutrition Handbook evaluation

The Agency recently conducted research to assess the views of a range of professionals on the presentation, readability and application of the Handbook on Nutrition in Northern Ireland. In addition to assessing the level of satisfaction with the Handbook, the research invited suggestions on how it might be improved. The results of the survey showed that:

- 24% of respondents reported using the Handbook 'often', with 63% using it 'sometimes';
- the Handbook was used for a variety of purposes: 94% stated that they used it as a general reference document, with 81% using it to increase their general knowledge on nutrition.
- there was a high level of satisfaction with the readability (100%), structure (99%) and format (99%) of the Handbook;
- overall satisfaction with the Handbook was very good, with 63% 'very satisfied', 37% 'satisfied' and no one reporting dissatisfaction.

A number of suggestions were made for additional topics that could be included in subsequent editions of the Handbook. The need for training on a range of nutritional topics was also identified.

## 2nd European Health Promotion Award

The Health Promotion Agency has been chosen to coordinate entries for the 2nd European Health Promotion Award 1999-2000.

The objectives of this award are: to encourage those working in health promotion to evaluate their work, to reward excellence in health promotion practice, to provide financial support to help award winners continue their work and to share these experiences with others working in health promotion in Europe.

There are three awards of 14,000 Euros each, one of which is reserved for health promoting activity with underprivileged groups.

Entries from Northern Ireland will be shortlisted by a selection panel here in Northern Ireland. Up to five short-listed initiatives from each country will then be sent to a European Jury who will choose three winners. Aside from the three award winners, other initiatives may be selected to appear in a catalogue of good practice.

The closing date for applications is 30 November 1999. Shortlisting will take place by March 2000 and the winners will be announced by the European Jury in May 2000. For further information and an application form for these awards contact Rachel Kelly at the Agency. Telephone (01232) 311611 or Email: r.kelly@hpani.org.uk

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# Publications and resources

## Promoting Health



With 1999 being UN International Year of Older Persons it is timely that the most recent issue of the Agency's journal *Promoting Health*, published in June, focuses on older people's health.

The journal examines the implications of the increasing proportion of older people in the community and looks at ways of making sure that the added years people gain by living longer are healthy ones.

Contributors include Dr James McKenna, Chairman of Age Concern, who introduces the Millennium Debate of the Age and Les Allamby, Director of the Law Centre, Northern Ireland who examines some of the issues of greatest concern to older people.

Other articles look at what is being done in Northern Ireland to reduce the incidence of accidents among older people and some of the initiatives taking place to promote older people's health. There is also a report on the innovative recruitment policy of DIY retailer B&Q, whose oldest employee is 85 years old.

The next issue of the journal will be published in November 1999 and will combine the September and December issues to examine health promotion issues as we approach the year 2000. This will be a particularly relevant issue given the significance of 'Health for All by the Year 2000' to those working in health promotion.

## Activate Trainers Handbook

The Agency has recently revised the Activate Trainers Handbook. This resource explains the Activate Health Programme and the procedures for recruiting potential tutors and running Activate tutor training courses.

The revised Handbook will be distributed to all current Activate Trainers over the next few months.

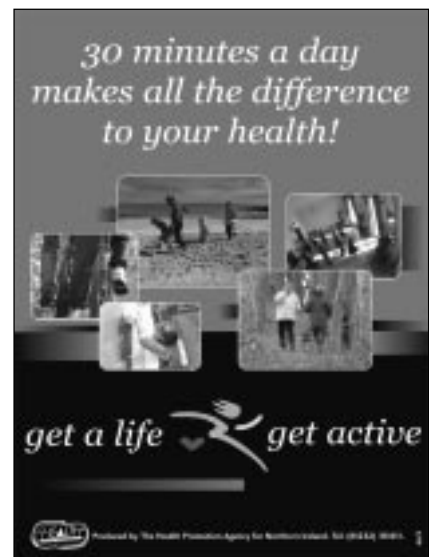


## Get a life - get active



A leaflet and poster have been published to accompany the current public information campaign on physical activity. They provide advice and information to help motivate people to become more active.

These are being distributed through the Central Health Promotion Resource Service in each Health and Social Services Board area.



**Website: [www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk](http://www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk)**

The Agency's website features a range of information about the Agency and its work. The site will be regularly updated to provide a current source of information for anyone with an interest in health promotion. Any comments you may have, or suggestions for additional information you would like to see on the site, will be very welcome.