

Inform

The bimonthly newsletter of the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland

Issue 63

February/March 2009

ISO 9001 quality management status award for HPA

UKAS, the official ISO awarding body in the UK, has awarded ISO 9001:2000 quality management status to the HPA. Gaining ISO 9001, by far the world's most established quality framework, helps all kinds of organisations to succeed through improved customer satisfaction, staff motivation and continual improvement.

An internal HPA quality team of 13 staff members worked over the last year to ensure the relevant work processes and documentation were in order, were being followed and that any improvements and recommendations were discussed and implemented where appropriate.

Speaking at the certificate presentation, Dr Gaffney, HPA Chief Executive, said: "Gaining ISO quality management accreditation acknowledges that we undertake our work professionally while striving to improve how we do things to ensure we are constantly setting the standard higher. Congratulations to everyone on this tremendous achievement."



At the ISO certificate presentation are, from left, Alice Quinn, Chair, HPA; Martin Rice, Managing Partner, Next Level Impact; Tony Sheridan, Communications Manager and ISO Coordinator, HPA; and Dr Brian Gaffney, Chief Executive, HPA.

Information

As we prepare to make the transition to the new Regional Agency for Public Health and Social Well-being, so too will we be reassessing all of our means of communication – including **Inform**. This issue of **Inform** is therefore the last issue to be produced by the HPA.

Inform has been published bimonthly since 1998 after we identified a need for communicating up-to-date and relevant information about the HPA, its work and particularly its events, training and campaigns. **Inform** continued to develop over the years and in response to your requirements.

We would like to thank you for your loyal readership and feedback throughout the lifespan of **Inform**.

MISSION: To make health a top priority for everyone in Northern Ireland

INSIDE:

- Get active community grant scheme – deferred
- The truth about cocaine
- Top marks for school food
- Up-2-You competition



**Health
Promotion
Agency**

Active Club's tutor training

Over 50 people have attended Active Club tutor training organised by the HPA and delivered by the British Heart Foundation National Centre for Physical Activity and Health. Attendees included sports development officers, youth workers, health development specialists, volunteers and after school leaders working with children aged 7–11.

The purpose of this training was to provide participants with practical examples of activities to get children more physically active. Every club or 'setting' represented at this training received a free copy of the Active Club pack. Using this resource, the trained tutors will provide training by delivering local Active Club workshops aimed at play workers. For details visit www.activeclubs.org.uk/home



Some of the participants get to grips with the practical activities at the Active Club's tutor training day in Lisburn.

Top marks for school food

School food: the essential guide will be launched this spring. This resource provides practical guidance through a series of booklets aimed at supporting health professionals, teachers, pupils, caterers and others to implement healthier eating and drinking in schools. It will be also available in the Irish language.

The guide has been developed to support the 'School food: top marks' programme. This is a school food initiative supported jointly by the Department of Education (DE), the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and the HPA.



A guide to implementing the nutritional standards for school lunches and other food and drinks in schools will also be launched.

Reprints update

The HPA is reprinting 40 of the most popular publications on alcohol, breastfeeding, nutrition, physical activity, sexual health, mental health, smoking and substance misuse.

To obtain copies of these reprinted resources, please contact the central health promotion resource service in your local health and social care trust.

Valentine's campaign

The HPA will again this year be running a radio advertising campaign promoting the safer sex message. The advertisements will be broadcast on local stations from 9 February until Valentine's Day on 14 February. As in previous years, the HPA is supporting local events developed by members of the Sexual Health Information Exchange Group.

Legacy document



The HPA will soon publish *A healthy legacy: 20 years of the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland*. This report will detail the extensive remit of work undertaken by the HPA over the last two decades that has ensured our mission "to make health a top priority for everyone in Northern Ireland" has remained the key focus of all activity.

In particular, the report highlights the influence the HPA has had in shaping policy related to public health, improving awareness of health and health promotion issues, educating the general public through comprehensive public information campaigns and training professionals through delivery of an extensive calendar of events, seminars, conferences and training courses.

The report also highlights essential research and evaluation that has underpinned all work and the development and nurturing of many collaborative relationships, programmes and initiatives in all sectors. The document will be available from the HPA corporate website.

Smoke-free legislation, studying the impact

The HPA recently carried out two research studies assessing the impact of smoke-free legislation, the 'Childhood exposure to tobacco smoke' (CHETS), and 'Adult non-smokers exposure to tobacco smoke' (ANETS) studies. Each was carried out pre- and post-legislation.

The first of these studies was a cross-sectional survey of year seven primary schoolchildren's exposure to second-hand smoke (SHS). Information was collected via a self-report questionnaire and the analysis of saliva samples to determine nicotine exposure.

This research aimed to determine the smoking status of children's families and friends, to assess where and how often children are exposed to SHS and determine any changes in children's exposure to SHS that have occurred since the introduction of smoke-free legislation.

The ANETS study specifically targeted non-smokers who live with a smoker pre- and post-legislation. The study aimed to determine non-smokers self-reported exposure to second hand smoke in a variety of locations including the home environment. The research also highlights non-smoker's knowledge of the health effects of SHS and their attitudes towards the smoke-free legislation before and after its introduction. Both studies will be available later in 2009 at www.spacetobreathe.org.uk

'Antibiotics can't beat colds and flu' campaign

A campaign to raise public awareness of inappropriate antibiotic use ran throughout the month of January.

The campaign highlighted that antibiotics won't cure viral infections such as colds, flu, most coughs and sore throats, and aimed to discourage unnecessary use.

The campaign included television, radio, poster and press advertising with all the advertising featuring the slogan 'Antibiotics can't beat colds and flu'.

Leaflets and posters were also produced as part of the campaign and were distributed to GP practices and pharmacies.



Public awareness of Lifeline

As part of the Lifeline evaluation strategy, research was conducted to assess public awareness of the Lifeline service and to test the effectiveness of the Lifeline advertising campaign.

A face-to-face survey was conducted with 1,000 people aged 16 years and over throughout Northern Ireland. The sample was representative of the wider population in terms of sex, age and social class. More than half the sample (55%) said they had heard of 'any' crisis helpline, with awareness higher amongst females than males (61% and 49% respectively). When asked specifically if they had ever heard of a crisis helpline called Lifeline, 39% indicated they had. Almost half (47%) of these became aware of Lifeline through TV advertisements.

A total of 51% could remember TV advertising encouraging people to call a helpline if in distress or despair, and 30% could recall specifically seeing the Lifeline TV advertisement. Of those who had recall of the TV advertisement, 15% were encouraged to think about their own mental health, and just over 1 in 10 (11%) had discussed mental/emotional issues with someone else. One in 8 (12%) of those who had seen the TV advertisement had sought help for someone else, with 7% indicating they had called Lifeline on behalf of someone else.

The majority believed Lifeline was aimed at both males and females equally. Respondents were less specific about what age group the service was aimed at but those who saw TV advertising were more likely than others to say that the service was for all ages. Respondents were most likely to say people would call the helpline with issues surrounding suicide/depression (65%), mental health (39%) and emotional health (28%).

These findings have highlighted that the current advertising campaign has proved effective in relaying that the service provides help to those having feelings of suicide or depression or those experiencing mental and emotional health problems.

Findings from this survey will inform development of further stages of promotion for the service.



Evaluation of ASIST programme

An all-island action plan on suicide prevention has been developed in conjunction with the DHSSPS in Northern Ireland and the National Office of Suicide Prevention (NOSP) in the Republic of Ireland.

A key issue in the action plan is acknowledgement of the need for greater cooperation in the development and evaluation of suicide prevention-related training programmes throughout Ireland.

One such programme is the all-island Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST), which has been running since 2003. An evaluation of the programme is now ongoing across the whole of Ireland and will include the views of stakeholders, and ASIST trainers and participants.

It is anticipated that the first phase of evaluation will be completed in March with a further follow-up of participants later in the year.

Suicide awareness training review

A final report and recommendations on training in Northern Ireland on suicide prevention are due for completion by the HPA in March.

The agency is reviewing the training against objectives identified in the *Promoting mental health strategy and action plan 2003-2008* and *Protect life - a shared vision: The Northern Ireland suicide prevention strategy and action plan 2006-2011*.

Meanwhile, training of instructors for the Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) programme in Northern Ireland is taking place in February and March. A series of public seminars has been organised at the same time to help launch the programme.

For further information, please contact Michelle McMaster, Mental Health Promotion Coordinator: Training and Development, HPA, on 028 9031 1611 or at m.mcmaster@hpani.org.uk



Karen on baby friendly visit

The new UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative Professional Officer for Wales, Mrs Karen Evans, visited the HPA earlier this year to find out more about support for the Baby Friendly Initiative in Northern Ireland.

An HPA and UNICEF collaboration established a few years ago resulted in the development of the same role for Northern Ireland, which was the first of its kind. Scotland is also following this lead in developing a similar post. It is hoped that these important posts will help ensure improved support for implementing and sustaining recognised best practice for the care of breastfeeding families.

Karen Evans, right, UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative Professional Officer for Wales, with Janet Calvert, Regional Breastfeeding Coordinator for the HPA.

Ageing Well Reach initiative training



The focus of the second year of the Ageing Well Reach initiative by Age Concern Northern Ireland and the HPA is on promoting good mental health. In response, a two-day stress

management training residential will take place with leaders of the 40 Ageing Well Reach groups in February.

This training, developed in partnership with the Ashton Centre, will have Open College Network (OCN) level two accreditation and will enable participants to: define stress; recognise signs and symptoms; and develop techniques to manage stress in themselves and others.

Staying active and having a sense of purpose is just as important for the mental health and wellbeing of older people as it is for younger people.

Wii workshop

Older people are starting to use the Nintendo Wii in a range of settings including day centres, older people's groups and people's homes. The Wii can be a fun way of exercising indoors and has been shown to help older people reinvent their leisure time in a way that is safe, convenient and fun.

In response to this trend, Ageing Well Reach held a Nintendo workshop in November. The workshop gave group leaders the chance to try out the game and also learn how to run a Nintendo workshop. This pilot was funded by the Eastern Health and Social Services Board through the Eastern Physical Activity Coordination Group.

For further information about both of these initiatives, contact Elma Greer at egreer@ageconcernni.org

Research and evaluation review

A summary report of HPA research activity during 2006-2007 will soon be available and will present researchers and health professionals with an overview of the main research findings from the year.

Research reported includes evaluations of the 'Breastfeeding welcome here' scheme; a breastfeeding awareness CD-ROM for schools; a community physical activity awards scheme; a community nutritional education

programme; 'No smoking day'; public information campaigns on physical activity and alcohol; surveys on young people and parents of young people aged 11-16; and research into mental health.

The report is used to measure the effectiveness of HPA/community programmes and to inform future campaigns. The review will be available in print and as a PDF file from the main HPA website.

Design for Living celebrates 10 years of achievement

The 10th anniversary of the Design for Living (DFL) partnership will be celebrated on 11 March in Lisburn.

The DFL partnership was established in 1999 in response to growing concerns for the mental and emotional health needs of children and young people. The partnership, comprising Action Mental Health, the Youth Council for Northern Ireland and the HPA, has worked on projects involving research, resource development, and training and professional development.

The half-day event in Lagan Valley Island, Lisburn, will celebrate the achievements of the partnership.

It will also highlight the evidence of effectiveness, and explore future developments and encourage enhanced collaboration in the area of mental health and emotional wellbeing of children and young people.

The event will be of interest to individuals and groups from the health, education, youth, voluntary and community sectors as well as representatives from local government.

To book a place at the event or for more information, please contact Claire Hind at c.hind@hpani.org.uk or on 028 9031 1611.

The truth about cocaine

The HPA is developing a leaflet highlighting the potential problems of cocaine to current users and those thinking about using the drug.

This is in response to research carried out by the HPA which showed that knowledge of the health risks of cocaine is very low and that it is

widely perceived to be a comparatively safe drug.

The truth about cocaine discusses the health dangers of using cocaine as well as its legal and social implications.

The draft leaflet is being tested with focus groups.

HPA gives smokers 4,000 reasons to quit



At the anti-smoking public information campaign launch is Gary Burnside, ex-smoker, with Margaret McCrory, Marketing Manager, HPA.

The HPA encouraged smokers to kick their habit in the New Year with a hard hitting public information campaign highlighting that every time a smoker has a cigarette they are inhaling over 4,000 chemicals.

The campaign was targeted at all adult smokers, particularly unskilled and semi-skilled manual workers.

Evidence shows that tobacco is a major cause of health inequalities and is the principal cause of the gap in life expectancy between rich and poor.

The campaign included TV, radio, online and outdoor advertising. The radio advertisements were developed in the form of testimonials to highlight the less well known health effects of smoking – throat cancer and gangrene.

Attending the campaign launch and addressing the audience was an ex-smoker of 42 years, Gary Burnside, who was diagnosed with laryngeal cancer in spring 2005. Mr Burnside said: "I was careless of the damage to my body that could be caused by smoking. As the cancer in my larynx was not arrested by radiotherapy, I eventually had to have the necessary operation which meant removing my voice box".

There are more than 600 smoking cessation services across Northern Ireland. Smokers can contact the Smokers' Helpline on 0800 85 85 85 for free support, advice and direction to their nearest smoking cessation service.

Smokers can also text 'QUIT' to 60900 to receive support by SMS and can visit the smoking cessation website www.want2stop.info

Up-2-You competition



The HPA has launched a competition through its website www.up-2-you.net to encourage young people to find out the facts about underage drinking. A survey of 11–16 year olds in Northern Ireland found that just over half (54%) have had an alcoholic drink and of those who had, over three quarters (76%) were aged 13 or under when they had their first drink.

Up-2-You competitions have attracted thousands of entries in the past, and this year the HPA is encouraging more young people to enter by

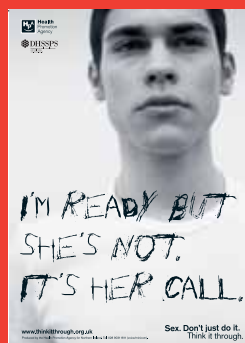
offering a prize of a laptop to the primary school, post-primary school and youth club in Northern Ireland with the most correct entries.

The interactive alcohol section of the site has information on how alcohol can affect people, an explanation of units, details of legal issues as well as practical advice on what to do if someone needs help and what to do in an emergency.

Sex 'think it through' campaign

Sex. Don't just do it. Think it through. This was the name of an HPA campaign that ran in March 2008 and was rerun in January 2009. The campaign aims to encourage young people to think before deciding to embark on a sexual relationship.

The campaign included outdoor (buses and poster sites), radio and online advertising as well as a poster advertising campaign in high street fitting rooms, and washrooms of further education colleges and pubs.



Alcohol campaign

The HPA is developing a new campaign to raise awareness among women of the health risks of drinking more than the daily recommended alcohol limits and to encourage women exceeding these guidelines to reduce the amount they drink.

An independent research company was commissioned to test a number of advertising concepts with the target audience. Focus groups were conducted during January and feedback from testing will be used to develop the campaign and message. The campaign will be launched during the spring.

Leaflet promoting responsible drinking

The HPA, in partnership with the PSNI, is developing a leaflet highlighting to parents how their drinking may influence their children.

You, your child and alcohol aims to encourage parents to think about their own drinking behaviour and attitudes, as well as the possible health and social consequences of teenage drinking.

The draft leaflet has been tested with focus groups and, following analysis of the results, the leaflet will be produced and distributed to parents.

Training and events: February–April

The events/training section on the HPA website www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk will be kept updated with further information. There will be an online booking facility for most events unless otherwise stated. Look out for the **B** symbol.

Creating healthy workplace training 17, 18, 24 and 25 February

This four-day training workshop aims to equip participants with the skills and knowledge to either advise and support other organisations in creating healthy workplaces or implement a programme within their own organisation.

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training programme seminars 23 February–6 March

For further information contact Michelle McMaster, Mental Health Promotion Coordinator: Training and Development, HPA on 028 9031 1611 or at m.mcmaster@hpani.org.uk

Breastfeeding Coordinators Forum annual training seminar

3 March, 12.30–4.30pm

Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, Craigavon

Speakers will be Mrs Carmel Duffy and Dr Magda Sachs. For further information contact Lesley Blackstock on 028 9031 1611 or at l.blackstock@hpani.org.uk

B Design for Living celebration event 11 March (am)

Lagan Valley Island, Lisburn

This two-day course provides an evidence-based, conceptual framework against which to examine your experience of working collaboratively and building partnerships and alliances for health.

For further information, go to the events/training section of the HPA website.

UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative breastfeeding management course 1–3 April

Antrim Enterprise Agency

For further information contact
Lesley Blackstock on
028 9031 1611 or at
l.blackstock@hpani.org.uk



Breastfeeding poster design competition

The HPA is running a poster design competition for art and design students at the University of Ulster and further education colleges across Northern Ireland between January and March.

The 'Breastfeeding is best' competition aims to encourage the students to produce an eye-catching poster that could change perceptions of breastfeeding among young mums aged 16–25, ultimately encouraging them to breastfeed.

The winning student will receive £500 and their poster will be used to promote National



Breastfeeding Awareness Week throughout Northern Ireland in May.

The competition winner will also have the opportunity to follow the poster through development and production by the HPA design team for the campaign launch in May.

Healthy prisons update

The Northern Ireland Prison Service, South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust and the HPA are working together to pilot Health Promoting Prisons in Hydebank Wood Prison and Young Offenders Centre.

The aim of this pilot is to improve the health and wellbeing of staff and prisoners through taking into account the many elements of prison which can impact on the health of prisoners and staff, including policies and practice. Work will focus on three key areas: physical activity, nutrition and mental health promotion.

A one-day workshop took place in January. This provided an opportunity for staff to learn about and discuss how a health promoting prison approach can improve their own health and wellbeing, add value to their work and contribute to work plans in the future.

Demand for Work Well guide

The HPA has continued to work with a number of workplaces that have expressed interest in using *Work Well: healthy workplace guide*. Interest has been high following the October 2008 joint Business in the Community/HPA conference 'What works at work?'

The guide is available to download at www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk/Work/workwell/publications.htm

For further information contact Linda Barclay at l.barclay@hpani.org.uk or Laura Donnelly at l.donnelly@hpani.org.uk



Get Active cash grant scheme is deferred

In 2008, the Get Active in the Community Cash Grant Awards scheme reached its 10th anniversary. Originally developed by the HPA in support of the Northern Ireland physical activity strategy and funded by the DHSSPS, the awards scheme provided financial support to community and voluntary groups to enable them to develop initiatives aimed at encouraging the sedentary population to have a more active lifestyle.

Evaluations of the scheme showed the importance of this type of approach in engaging people for health benefits.

The HPA has agreed to defer the scheme while the new Regional Agency for Public Health and Social Well-being is being established from 1 April. This will allow time for any future scheme to be considered, developed and promoted within the context of the public health strategy and with the support of new health and social care structures.

Physical activity for older people

The British Heart Foundation National Centre (BHFNC) facilitated a one-day consultation event in December to further explore how physical activity messages can be interpreted by and communicated to older adults and professionals working with this age group.

This event has helped contribute to the development of new physical activity guidelines for older people that will be made available from BHFNC in the spring. Presentations and discussion at this event reinforced the need for older people to be active on a regular basis and the need to have tailored physical activity messages for specific medical conditions.

Healthy eating online

'Enjoy healthy eating' is the message from the HPA as it develops a new website www.enjoyhealthyeating.info due to be unveiled in March.

The website is aimed specifically at adults and will contain information on healthy eating, recipes, and advice on how you can improve your eating habits.

The site complements the HPA's *Enjoy healthy eating* leaflet and features many of the same recipes. It will be updated regularly and visitors will be encouraged to submit their favourite healthy recipes or questions relating to nutrition.

For further information, contact Laura Donnelly at l.donnelly@hpani.org.uk

Anti-tobacco evaluation

In January 2008, the HPA launched phase one of an anti-tobacco campaign aimed at adult smokers seeking to motivate them to attempt to quit by raising awareness of the 4,000 dangerous chemicals inhaled when they smoke.

The campaign ran for four weeks and included television, radio, online and poster advertising as well as an SMS text support service. The campaign was evaluated using 700 adults and a further 325 smoking adults to gain a better understanding of the campaign's impact on smokers.

Overall, 78% of the sample of adults could recall seeing at least one element of the campaign, with a higher level of recall among younger respondents (16–29, 83%) compared with older respondents (65+, 67%). Of those who had seen the TV ad, 97% felt that it was either very believable (77%) or somewhat believable (22%).

Smokers exposed to the campaign were more likely to have made a quit attempt than smokers not exposed to the campaign. Of all respondents, 72% were aware of the Smokers' Helpline, promoted as part of the campaign. Smokers were more likely than non-smokers to be aware of the helpline. It was encouraging for the evaluation to show that those exposed to the campaign were significantly more likely to correctly identify the dangerous chemicals present in cigarette smoke.



Report to highlight WHO HPH network

The HPA will soon publish the latest report on the development of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Health Promoting Hospitals (HPH) and Health Services network in Northern Ireland.

The report outlines the range of work and initiatives ongoing in each of the 13 member hospitals, detailed under the five new health and social care trusts, participating in the HPH network here.

Among the wide-ranging initiatives and information included in the report are: details of the signing of the new WHO HPH constitution; Belfast Trust's Safer Patients Initiative; Northern Trust's vision for nursing and midwifery services detailed in *Our futures, our journey*; South Eastern Trust's implementation of the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative; activities undertaken by the Southern Trust's Maternity Services Liaison Committee (MSLC) and Western Trust's introduction of the Paddington Alcohol Test (PAT) screening tool to identify hazardous drinkers.

The report will be available online on the HPA website at www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk

New breast screening leaflets

To reflect the forthcoming extension of the Northern Ireland breast screening programme to women up to age 70, the HPA is redeveloping its range of breast screening material.

The four leaflets are being revised and redesigned with the following titles: *Breast screening can save lives*, *Breast awareness: looking out for changes*, *Satisfactory test results: what now?* and *Why have I been called back?*

The leaflets have undergone testing and will be available for the roll-out of the expanded programme in March. A fifth leaflet for women with implants, *What if I have breast implants?* will also be added to the range. Previously, only women aged 50–65 were invited for screening.

Contact details:

A Healthy Service – Supporting health in hospitals

Barbara Porter – b.porter@hpani.org.uk

Alcohol and Drugs

Victoria Creasy – v.creasy@hpani.org.uk

Breastfeeding

Janet Calvert – j.calvert@hpani.org.uk

Campaigns

Margaret McCrory – m.mccrory@hpani.org.uk

CEMACH

Dr Angela Bell – angela.bell@cemach.org.uk or

Terry Falconer – terry.falconer@cemach.org.uk

Food in Schools

Jennifer McBratney – j.mcbratney@hpani.org.uk

Health Intelligence (Research and information)

Diana Gossrau-Breen – d.gossrau-breen@hpani.org.uk

Naomi McCay – n.mccay@hpani.org.uk

Health Promoting Workplaces

Linda Barclay – l.barclay@hpani.org.uk

Mental Health, Teenage Pregnancy and Sexual Health

Deirdre McNamee – d.mcnamee@hpani.org.uk

Nutrition, Physical Activity for the early years and Oral Health

Angela McComb – a.mccomb@hpani.org.uk

Physical Activity

Nicola Browne – n.browne@hpani.org.uk

Publications

Ruth Knowles – r.knowles@hpani.org.uk

Public Relations

Jenny Dougan – j.dougan@hpani.org.uk or

Rosemary McGaughey – r.mcgaughey@hpani.org.uk

Training and External Events

Claire Hind – c.hind@hpani.org.uk

This is the last issue of **Inform** to be published by the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland. We hope this

publication has met your needs in terms of providing you with timely and relevant information about the HPA's work. If you have any comments you would like to make about **Inform** or any other HPA resource please contact the editorial office by email at t.sheridan@hpani.org.uk or contact us in writing at the address below.

Production team

Sean Arbuckle, Gavin Bell, Linda Giles, Michele Crooks and Tony Sheridan.

Editorial office

Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland
18 Ormeau Avenue, Belfast BT2 8HS.
Tel: 028 9031 1611. Fax: 028 9031 1711.

Websites:

www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk
www.breastfedbabies.org
www.drugsalcohol.info
www.getalifegetactive.com
www.helpprotectyourself.info
www.hpa-pod.org
www.knowyourlimits.info
www.mindingyourhead.info
www.spacetobreathe.org.uk
www.thesnackpack.net
www.thinkitthrough.org.uk
www.up-2-you.net
www.want2stop.info



**Health
Promotion
Agency**

Research on cocaine use

Research on the use of cocaine has helped inform the development of a leaflet for cocaine users.

Following qualitative research conducted in March 2008, the HPA commissioned a quantitative survey of 735 18–35 year olds to further investigate the prevalence of attitudes, level of knowledge, motivations and patterns of behaviour related to cocaine use in Northern Ireland.

The findings show that 37% (n=253) of respondents who completed the main survey have taken drugs recreationally and, of these respondents, 14% (n=106) have taken cocaine recreationally. Lifetime prevalence rates for cocaine use show higher levels of usage among males versus females (20% against 9%), and specifically among males aged 30–35 (22%).

Among those who had ever used cocaine, 64% were users at the time of survey, with 8% reporting use of cocaine more than a few times per week and nearly one quarter using it a few times a month (23%). A total of 14% report using cocaine a few times per year and 19% rarely, with 32% saying that they no longer use the drug.

House parties were found to be the most common setting for taking cocaine (58%), followed by clubs (17%).

Research also shows that among those who have ever used cocaine, 58% reported using cannabis, with 36% having used Ecstasy and 24% having used amphetamines. In addition, more than three quarters reported using cocaine along with alcohol (77%), and almost a third use cocaine with cannabis (31%).

Overall, 88% of respondents believed that drug use can cause long-term damage to health. However, those who had taken illicit drugs were less likely to believe this (82% against 92% of non drug users).

Half of all respondents (50%) recorded 'don't know' when asked about the maximum penalty for possession of cocaine; 40% not knowing for 'cocaine causes chest pains'; 38% for 'cocaine causes seizures'; and 37% for 'cocaine is a significant cause of brain haemorrhage/stroke in young adults'.

Delaying early sex resource

The HPA has developed a training guide and support materials for use with young people aged 14–16.

Ready or not? – Let's leave it 'til later has been developed to support strategic efforts to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies and address the increase in sexually transmitted infections.

It aims to strengthen the skills of those who work with young people in discussing pressures to have early sex in a way that will help young people think through the issues and make their own informed choices about sex and relationships.

The approach focuses on building key skills such as assertiveness, confidence and communication, and looks at issues such as self-esteem, understanding emotions, friendship skills and rights. The key areas covered, using interactive methods to engage young people, are: relationships, respect, rights, regret, reality, readiness, risks, responsibility and reflections.

The HPA has commissioned AIDS Care Education and Training (ACET) Northern Ireland to test the materials with young people, and to accredit them. Following testing, the materials will be developed further and disseminated through training.