

TAG: Risk & Communication & Behavioural Insights sub-group

07 October 2020 Notes

Attendees

Ann John (Chair) (AJ)

NR

NR

Apologies from

NR

Draft minutes/actions from the previous meeting

Draft minutes were agreed.

Achieving Behaviour Change - guide for national government – presentation by Professor

NR

NR provided some background to guide that was nearing completion (with PHE for sign off), noting it was underpinned by the Behaviour Change wheel/COM-B.

NR also introduced the **APEASE** criteria – acceptability, practicability, effectiveness, affordability, spill-over effects and equity – for assessing interventions, with evaluation in mind.

NR noted a recent WHO report on pandemic fatigue¹, querying the application of the COM-B approach and the title/ phrase but suggesting many of the recommendations were potentially useful nonetheless.

There was a discussion around the use of behavioural insights in government. There is a genuine willingness to use behavioural insights to inform the pandemic response, albeit there is scope for improvement (e.g. not understanding there is an intent to self-isolate but often capability may be lacking through lack of support). This can result in an inappropriate policy response.

NR raised the issue of using behavioural science to improve the use of behavioural science in the system, concurring the motivation exists among policy makers but there is possibly a capability issue.

¹ See <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/publications-and-technical-guidance/2020/pandemic-fatigue-reinvigorating-the-public-to-prevent-covid-19-september-2020-produced-by-who-europe>

NR asked whether there is literature available to measure efficacy of implementation science. NR referred to the initial focus on fomites, with the response to train around eye/nose/mouth touching and shift to recognising the role of aerosols in transmission, with a very different strategy required (e.g. ventilation in enclosed spaces). The difficulty in measuring this was recognised, with secondary measures suggested, objective or subjective. For example, is it possible to assess (objectively) the proportion of people arriving at a venue and entering/leaving when it is busy?

NR asked whether we should focus our attention on motivation and capability i.e. providing the skills for people to make decisions. NR suggested we don't down play the importance of opportunity.

NR also raised the issue of environmental restructuring to make spaces COVID-19 secure, suggesting the potential value in a 'COVID kit' (e.g. face covering, sanitiser) to help create an environment conducive to people making the necessary changes to minimise risk (e.g. when doing something where there may be little choice, such as grocery shopping).

NR raised the issue of higher education, noting Independent SAGE had recommended remote learning but universities were continuing to plan for student attendance. NR wondered if there was value in coming at the issue from a harm reduction perspective, universities doing their best to keep students safe and equip them with ways to mitigate the risk if they are mixing (e.g. emphasise outdoor spaces if possible and suggest different ways of greeting each other). Evidence suggests people will be more likely to follow rules if they understand them.

NR thanked NR for his contribution and outlined how his work and that of colleagues on SPI-B had helped inform work of the sub-group and in Welsh Government's response so far.

Research priorities

NR has circulated information on funded research to date via the UKRI's useful tool allowing the user to search by theme².

AJ has some thoughts specific to mental health, as well as sharing a series of research areas from POST directly after the meeting, including a public health messaging theme³. This exercise provides a real opportunity for the group to put forward some research questions for consideration within Welsh Government (and beyond).

Action

- NR check with Kieran Walshe on timing to contribute suggestions to the R&D sub-group.

² See <https://www.ukri.org/research/coronavirus/covid-19-research-and-innovation-supported-by-ukri/>

³ See https://post.parliament.uk/covid-19-areas-of-research-interest/?utm_source=POST&utm_medium=Banner&utm_campaign=Home

- All to share any suggestions for priorities prior to the next meeting (now 21st October).
- To pick up at the next meeting [NR] offer to work with one of his students.

Sub-group webinar

AJ suggested she open and chair the session, with [NR] possibly closing the session. There was general agreement to involve three presenters, each with 15 minutes, with two from the sub-group and an external.

Action

- To discuss content and speakers at the next meeting and run the proposal by TAG before finalising and arranging.

Ipsos MORI/PHW survey update (standing item)

[NR] noted some additional questions were to be included in Ipsos MORI's data collection at the weekend, covering symptom recognition and test seeking behaviour, understanding of current guidance and use/awareness of NHS contact tracing app, as well as some analysis by local lockdown status.

Action

- [NR] to circulate the questions used and the sub-group to suggest areas for investigation should they wish to do so.

AOB

Action

- To discuss NPIs and loneliness/social isolation (raised at Tuesday's TAG meeting) at the next meeting as there was insufficient time to discuss today.