

The Crisis of Confidence in Public Health Policy and Practice: the Search for a New Paradigm

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Public Health: Losing its Way?

Public health has historically been one of the vital forces leading to...collective action for health and well-being.

The widespread impression exists today that this leading role has been weakening and that public health is experiencing a severe identity crisis as well as a crisis of organisation and accomplishment.

Julio Frenk (1992), Minister for Health, Mexico

Structure of Talk

- Why is public health in crisis?
- What is wrong with policy, governance and leadership?
- The new governance

Policy Paradox

Public health is high on the policy agenda
but its capacity and capability remain
weak

Why?

- Confused and inconsistent government policy: nanny state v. enabling state?
- Jigsaw policies that push and pull in different directions

Prime Minister's Speech on Healthy Living

- Support for firm action by government – ‘personal journey of change’
- Anti-nanny state and enabling role for government

Individual and Community Oriented Preventative Action for Health

Individually
oriented
preventative
action



Intersectoral action for Health. WHO. 1986

Chief Medical Officer for England's Critique

- Public health budgets raided to reduce hospital deficits or meet acute care targets
- Lack of investment in public health workforce
- Weakening effect of constant NHS reorganisation

This situation has not been created by any person or group of people. It is the result of many disparate factors, but at its heart is a set of attitudes that emphasises short-term thinking, holds too dear the idea of the hospital bed and regards the prevention of premature death, disease and disability as an option not a duty.

CMO's Annual Report 2005 (July 2006)

Greater Manchester Health Inequalities Review (Audit Commission)

- No health vision and a lack of champions
- Concerted action absent
- No overall leadership
- Constant reconfiguration prevents progress
- Management time focused on planning for and spending small amounts of money – ‘projectitis’
- Lack of engagement with voluntary sector
- Minimal use of information
- DsPH have too wide a range of responsibilities – job stretch
- The collective role to all sectors is unclear

Shifting the Balance

Numerous policy statements and initiatives in the field of public health have not resulted in a rebalancing of policy away from health care (a 'national sickness service'). This will not happen until there is a realignment of incentives in the system to focus on reducing the burden of disease and tackling the key lifestyle and environmental risks.

Derek Wanless (2004) Securing Good Health for the Whole Population

Barriers to Shifting the Balance from Ill-health to Health

- Capacity problems
- Impact of successive NHS reorganisations
- Terror by targets culture
- Lack of alignment of performance management mechanisms between partners
- Fitness for purpose
- Weak leadership
- Absence of effective governance

Dynamics Without Change

Any suggestion of real reform has been a deceit. Working patterns, practice and custom are at the heart of many capacity issues [in the NHS] and have never been challenged.

It is extraordinary the gap between highly motivated frontline staff and the systemic dysfunctionality in which they operate.

Aidan Halligan, former Deputy CMO (2006)

What is Wrong with Policy, Governance and Leadership?

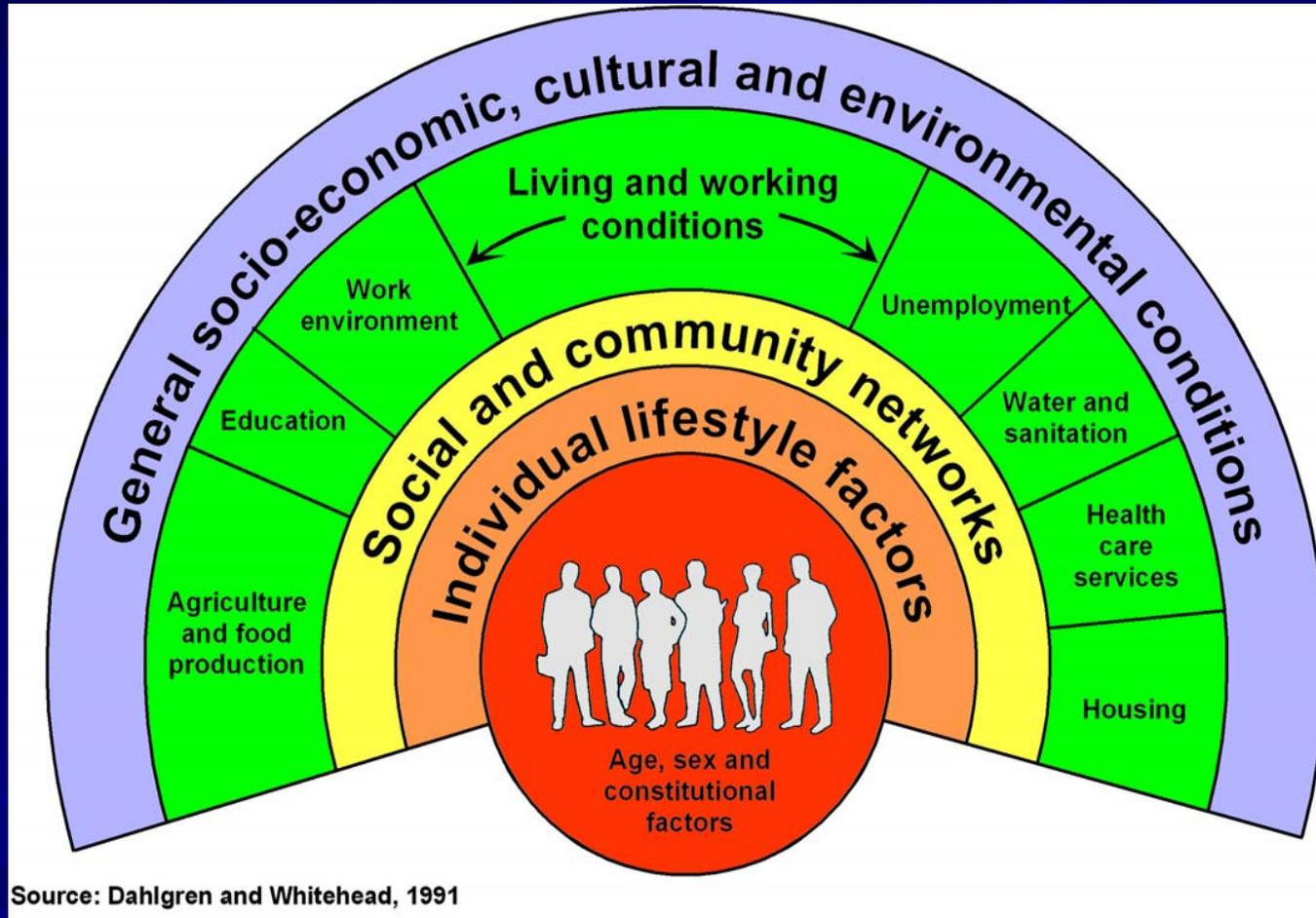
- Politicians have become managers – politics have become managerialised
- Managers have become politicians – management has become politicized
- Terror by targets
- Balloon squeezings
- More of the same is the answer: more management, more performance assessment
- Does government want leaders or followers?
- We are not dealing with a machine but a complex adaptive system

Complex Adaptive System

A collection of individual agents with freedom to act in ways that are not always totally predictable, and whose actions are interconnected so that one agent's actions changes the context for other agents.

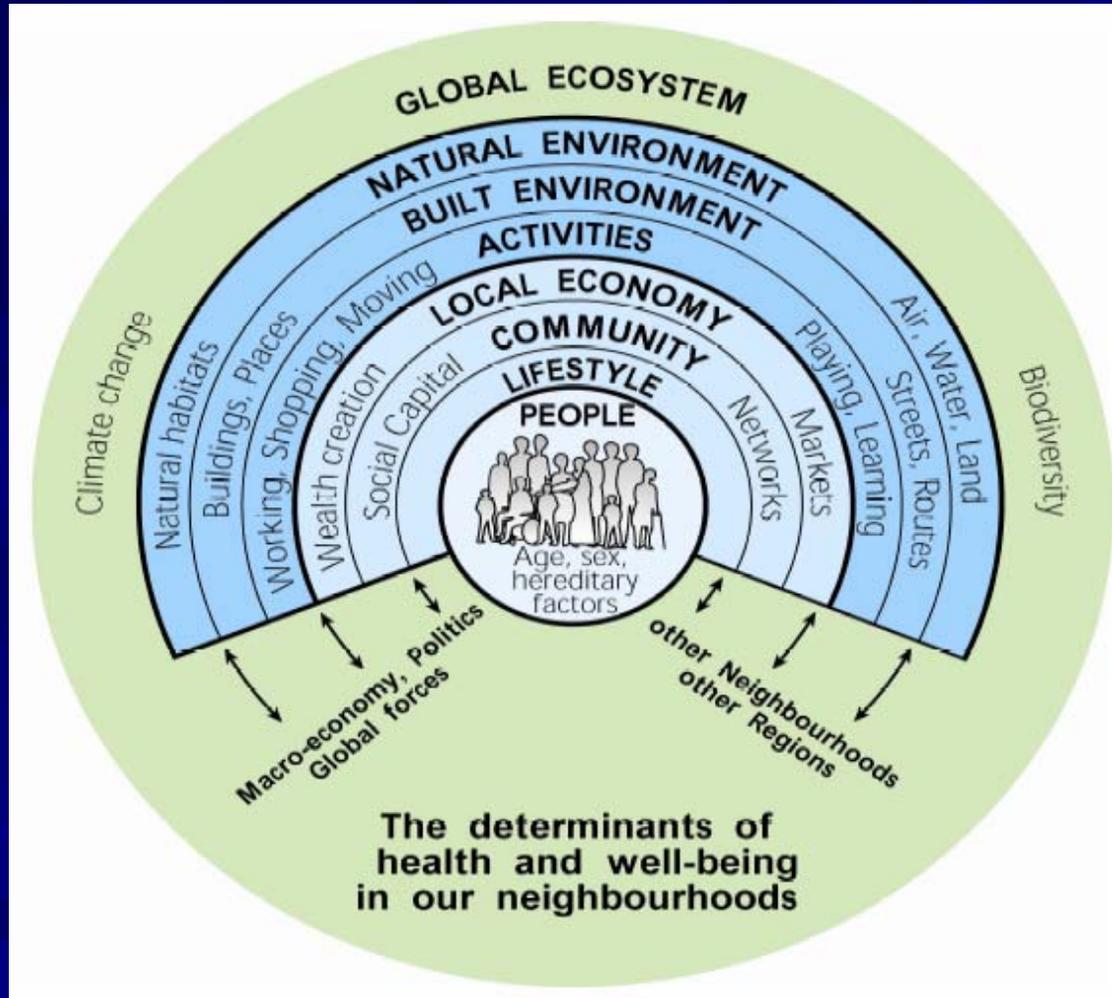
Plsek and Greenhalgh (2001), British Medical Journal

The Main Determinants of Health



Source: Dahlgren and Whitehead, 1991

Global Determinants of Health



The Public Health System



The Public Health System

The concept of a public health system describes a complex network of individuals and organisations that have the potential to play critical roles in creating the conditions for health. They can act for health individually, but when they work together toward a health goal, they act as a system – a public health system.

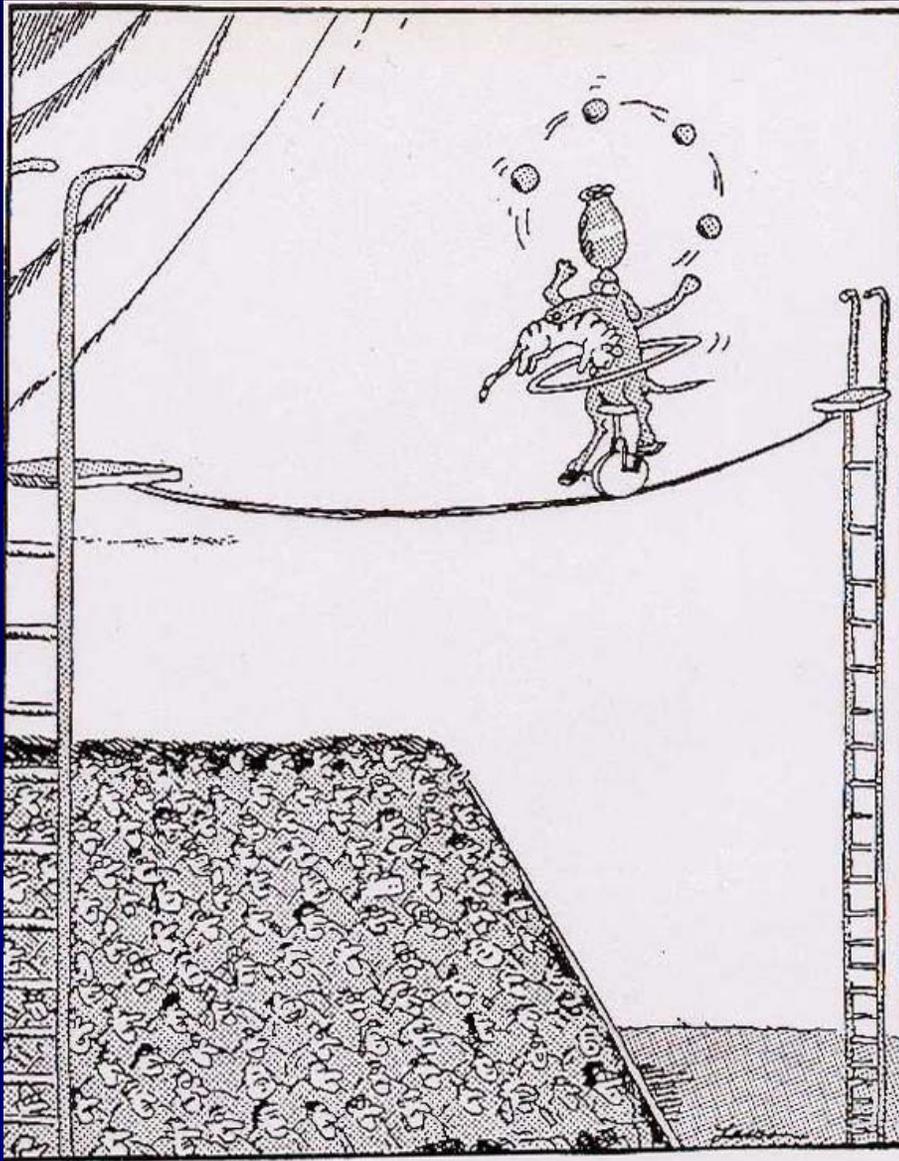
Institute of Medicine (2003)

The New Governance

- Healthy populations versus healthy institutions?
- Health service managers or managers of health?
- Managerial epidemiology: responsibility for the health of a defined population
- Place-shaping role

Health in All Policies (HiAP)

- Horizontal, policy-related strategy aimed at contributing to improved population health
- Complementary to more common approaches of public health and health care services
- Takes into account the health impacts of other policies when planning policies, deciding between various policy options, and implementing policies in other sectors
- HiAP aims to clarify links between policies and interventions, health determinants and consequent outcomes
- Ultimate aim: to create evidence-based policy-making by assessing and discussing the possible health impacts of existing policies as well as proposed policies



High above the hushed crowd, Rex tried to remain focused. Still, he couldn't shake one nagging thought:

He was an old dog and this was a new trick