

## Board of science report

### Written report to the ARM

Professor David Strain was appointed as chair of the board of science in January 2022 for a three-year term. Dr Melody Redman was elected by the board to the role of deputy chair over the last session and will be returning to her position in the 2023-24 session after a period of maternity leave.

#### Board of science priorities

Over the last session the board has continued to work on the three areas identified as a priority:

- Suicide prevention (including links to gambling harm)
- Addressing the health impact of economic inequality
- Underscoring the link between dental and broader bodily health

After a considerable amount of joint working with the British Dental Association (BDA) the work on the links between dentistry and bodily health has come to a natural end. The board has moved its third priority to work on obesity (including stigma, language, equitable access to weight management services and classification as a risk factor, major condition or disease). More detailed workplans in these areas are being developed and the board hopes to collaborate with committees across the BMA and the Population health team to drive forward policy in these areas.

#### Events

In June 2022, Dr Melody Redman stepped in at the last minute, as I had another bout of COVID, to chair the annual Victor Horsley lectures at ARM 2022:

- Why we need to talk about fatigue (with speaker Dr Mike Farquhar)
- COVID19: Supporting inclusion and diversity in primary care clinical trials (with speaker Professor Mahendra Patel)
- Remote by default clinical care: solution or problem? (with speaker Professor Trish Greenhalgh)

In October 2023, JS Bamrah chaired the BMA's [virtual event](#) 'Suicide prevention – priorities in the next decade: In conversation with Professor Louis Appleby'. We had a 170 attendees and very positive feedback from the event. We used discussion from this event to formulate plans for a further event on suicide prevention.

In February 2023, the board held a [webinar](#) 'exploring the link between of gambling harm and suicide in contemporary Britain'. It was expertly chaired by Henrietta Bowedn-Jones and featured Carolyn Harris (MP, chair of APPG on gambling harm), Lord Foster of Bath (Chair of Peers for Gambling Reform) and Will Prochaska (strategic director of Gambling with Lives). More than 200 people attended and we are gained some excellent feedback from this event.

In June 2023 we hosted a further event on suicide prevention. This was an in-person symposium - 'Suicide prevention during economic crises: A UK approach'. The event was compered by Nick Ross and hosted a range of excellent speakers such as Amandip Sidhu (founder of Doctors in Distress) and Sarah Hughes (chief executive of Mind). The event brought together attendees across a range of sectors and provided an opportunity for rich discussion to help shape BMA policy asks in this area.

#### Lobbying and engagement work

On 9<sup>th</sup> June 2022 I attended the Khan Report Launch organised by the Department of Health. The Khan review is

an important step towards a Smokefree 2030 and attending the launch was an important way for the BMA to support the recommendations made, including an extra £125m investment. Although clearly justifying the need for this funding, the government have offered a fraction of what is required. We have continued to campaign that this is rectified, whilst also wading in on the great Vape debate. With regard the latter, we have made significant headway, and added our voice to the calls that have seen the government commitment to invest in a preventative strategy towards new vape starters and advertising to children with appropriate Public health involvement.

In the run up to Christmas 2022, the board worked in collaboration with multiple other teams across the BMA including the public health medicine committee (PHMC) and the population health team to launch a health inequalities campaign leading up to the launch of the BMA's 'Our country is getting sicker' [report](#). The report called for urgent action to protect the population's health and address growing inequalities. This received significant attention and, importantly for the association, saw a significant jump in the public's support for the BMA and the profession in general. This will be an essential component in the success of the current trade union activity towards pay restoration.

In December 2022, I represented the BMA at a European Round table on anti-microbial resistance hosted by Professor Dame Sally Davies in Brussels. Post Brexit, these meetings have been an essential route to influencing international policy on matters that cross geographical borders such as antibiotic usage, investment in research and the important role of professionals in the stewardship of these treatments. I was able to give the examples of the role the UK had played in development of new therapies and, during COVID, the shared risk approach that had facilitated vaccination development. This directly led to a motion being brought to EU parliament looking to replicate the system, and importantly including UK health care professionals and companies in the development of new treatments.

Throughout the session we have continued work closely with various alliances we are part of including the Alcohol Health Alliance (AHA), Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) and the Obesity Health Alliance (OHA). On 23 May 2023, I attended the parliamentary launch of the OHA Manifesto where we championed the success of the sugar levy, whilst continued to put pressure on representatives from both side of the house regarding the implementation of the limitation on 2 for 1 campaigns and advertising of junk food targeting children. This ongoing engagement facilitated a call from DHSC ahead of the recent announcement of an expansion in weight management services on 7<sup>th</sup> June. This allowed us to influence the way this is to be carried out and call for appropriate funding and educational time to be afforded to any primary care practitioner who were to be asked to run the pilots. Most recently the BMA has become a member of the National Suicide Prevention Alliance (NSPA) which we hope will strengthen out lobbying work in this area.

In May 2023, in conjunction with the BMA's PHMC, the board responded to the Government's white paper on Gambling harm. We outlined that, while the proposed levy is better than the current arrangements, it is unlikely to modify the behaviour of the industry and should not be seen as a long-term solution to reducing or preventing gambling harms. Expertise on the board will help shape the associations response to the consultation on the white paper, expected to be published in summer 2023.

The board's involvement with the ongoing COVID enquiry continues. This has included a range of activities. On the 13<sup>th</sup> June, I attended the NICE review of Covid Medicines Delivery units to ensure clinically extremely vulnerable adults continue to be able to access treatments once the service is decommissioned. Working with the occupational medicine committee (OMC), we have published the biggest review of doctors still suffering with long COVID. This highlighted that they need ongoing support, and that special COVID leave needs to be continued for those who are unable to fulfil all of their previous roles. I have attended APPGs, the NHS Long COVID taskforce and worked with the March for Change team, highlighting the number of our members that have lost livelihoods whilst working through the pandemic.

Finally, during the April wave of junior doctors strikes I spent a considerable amount of media time refuting the claims of increased mortality associated with the first strike were a direct result of the action. Correlation is, of course, not causation; the increase mortality is a was seen across England and Wales due to the newer variant of COVID in circulation at the time.

Over the last session the board has also written and signed several letters and appeared in various media outlets regarding population health matters, including (but not limited to):

- Signatory of [letter](#) to the BMJ following publication of the Khan review – 9 June 2022
- Signatory of public [letter](#) to Jo Churchill (as the minister responsible) urging the Government to adopt a more ambitious PPM2.5 target. It was also copied to the public health minister and [published on the RCP's website](#).- 27 June 2022
- Signatory of [letter](#) to PM Truss from the Obesity Health Alliance regarding measures to promote children's health – 21 September 2022

- Quoted in a [Telegraph article](#) on the announcement of Coca-Cola sponsorship deals with Liverpool, Tottenham, Bayern Munich, PSG and Juventus football teams – 29 September 2022
- Letter jointly signed by the chair of PHMC, BoS and PLG to Dr Jenny Harries OBE, regarding anti-viral treatment for COVID-19 – 13 October 2022
- A letter to the Times calling on the Government to make England smoke-free (hitting a target of reducing smoking rates to 5% or less) and to urgently replace the tobacco control plan which expires at the end of 2022 – 14 October
- We joined over 100 organisations to add our support to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation [letter](#) to Rishi Sunak to urge him to keep his promise to increase benefits in line with inflation - 27 October 2022
- Jointly signed a [letter](#) to Rishi Sunak asking him to commit to an Independent Review on Alcohol Harm - 3 November 2022
- A [letter](#) to Therese Coffey regarding the indications that we may be pulling back from the commitment to reduce environmental pollution ahead of COP27 – 4 November 2022
- Appeared on the Andrew Marr show to talk about the ONS figures suggesting we have more people off work than ever before - 16 May 2023

## Blogs

Over the last session the board has produced a range of blogs which cover a number of population health matters:

- [A trusted voice](#) – July 2022 (For decades, it has helped make Britain a safer, healthier place. The BMA board of science's two leaders tell Seren Boyd about how they plan to use doctors' influence to bring about positive change)
- [The cost-of-living crisis is a health crisis: why we are supporting JRF and Big Future](#) – November 2022 (A lack of economic security will force millions to make hard decisions between eating or heating this winter)
- [Obesity research boost is welcome but Government must remember prevention is better than the cure](#) – November 2022
- [Lockdown, three years on: what have we learnt and what next](#) – March 2023 (co-written with Dr Kitty Mohan, BMA international committee (IC) chair)
- [Salt solution](#) – May 2023 (This blog marks Salt Awareness Week, the annual campaign shining a light on the hidden salt in our favourite foods, and which lobbies for restrictions on the amounts added to processed food)

## Final words

Finally, on behalf of the board, I would like to formally express thanks to all the staff members from across the BMA who have supported our work, including our secretariat, the population health team, and our colleagues in the BMA's public affairs, communications and media teams, and all of the other specialist committees such as the PHMC, Patient Liaison Group, OMC and the IC who willingly lend their support to maintain the optics of the BMA as both a trade union and a professional body. In these difficult times, maintaining this standing with public support will be absolutely essential in order for us to achieve our goals. I am really excited to continue to work with all of you as we approach the new session.

**Professor David Strain**  
**Chair, Board of science**  
[Board of science overview](#)