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**East Midlands '5 Pack + 1' series
Developing environmental health
research and legal lessons
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Researching environmental health – a solution to our 'invisibility'?

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Health Research*





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The EH 'research' paradox

Arguably, EHPs encounter more challenges to public health *in situ* than any other health profession, yet this experience is so seldom the subject of research, and even more rarely published, so we really shouldn't be surprised when our efforts go unnoticed



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Result: 'Invisibility' (Dhesi, 2014)

Faced with the challenge of a lead role in public health, and against a back-drop of the increasing relevance of the social determinants of health, we are ill-prepared to make use of the existing 'evidence base'...let alone establish a 'new' one

Beyond this ... 'obscurity'?



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Our persona is that of 'passive servant', unquestioning of the 'higher authority' - management, increasingly, 'change management' - so, as a professional grouping, we are powerless to challenge the empiricism of those who would see us entrenched in regulatory enforcement of their bidding...or worse

Report of the 'Research Task Group' – April 2012



- 'Battersby Review' - uncompromising in its criticism of the CIEH in failing to take/maintain the professional lead on research and publication
- Since then, progress made to see some of the recommendations advanced, but not all, and time is moving on...



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'The 'Battersby Review', 2012 (a different perspective)

'Any person who considers himself or herself to be a professional working in environmental health has also to consider that they have a responsibility that goes beyond merely meeting the needs of their employer'



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'Practitioner-researcher'

Sentiments of Battersby Review have acquired a resonance and the subject of regular discussion at a number of fora – CIEH, SIG and EHRNet - which suggests that EHPs should find themselves supported if they accept responsibility as 'practitioner-researchers' and engage in 'real world research'



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Traditional view of 'Research'

'Seeking through methodical processes - using a systematic method of enquiry - to add to one's own body of knowledge and that of others, by the discovery of non-trivial facts and insights...the province of talented people'

Howard & Sharp(1983): The Management of a Student Research Project'

Clifford Drew (1980): 'Introduction to Designing and Conducting Research'



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'Real World Research'

Not bound by academic orthodoxy – this is the province of the practitioner-researcher who inhabits the setting and wants to influence change and policy for the better - but which holds to the concept of research as a 'principled, careful and systematic enquiry' and the belief that this provides the best tool to achieve this.

'Real World Research: a resource for users of social research methods in applied settings' by Colin Robson (3rd Edition, 2011), Wiley



The 'challenge'...

How to engender:

- **self-awareness (recognising our capacity to inform and enlighten);**
- **self-confidence (challenging the perception that research is too 'hard')**
- **self-belief (we are engaged in 'real world research' in our 'day jobs')**



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First, can we all decide today to become 'practitioner-researchers'?

- If we don't, others less worthy, and far less capable, will (and there's nothing worse than reading about research that we would have done far better)
- Please commit to something today – if only to identify a topic for future research – and act upon it
- We have a personal and professional stake in discovering the effectiveness of strategies and interventions and discovering new vistas (the health and well-being of others may depend on it)

Challenge for EH as a profession and we as professionals – stay up on the hill or descend to the swamp (Shöen paradox)?



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Why research and publish?



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Service to EH/profession

- Contribute to the 'evidence base'
- Provide means of evaluating interventions and review priorities
- See research activity as a means of advancing the status of profession
- Reveal the plight of those we seek to serve

Self-advancement

- Enhance professional profile / status
- Research activity provides an interesting diversion from the hum-drum
- You set the direction that others must follow
- Nothing like seeing your work and name in print!

Get writing... and get 'published'!



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- Start modestly (leave *Nature* until next year) – start by responding to 'blogs' even Twitter (ghastly)
- Submit articles, 'opinion' pieces and 'letters' to trade magazines / EHN (editors will love you!)
- Turn a report produced for work into a 'case study' for a book or scenario for the Written Professional Exam or Interview (we need lots more of these)
- Produce a chapter for a book (then write a book!)
- Submit a paper to a peer-reviewed journal (JEHR!)



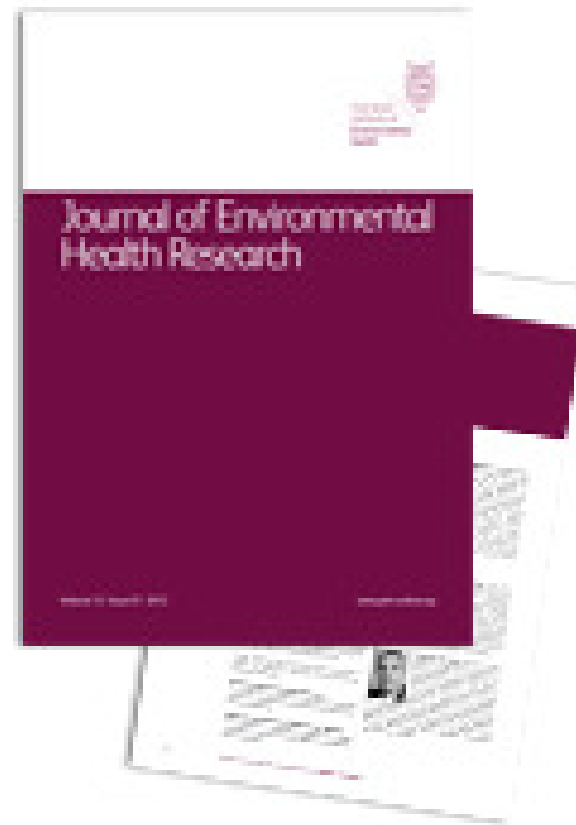
Some encouraging thoughts

- Write about things you know about and in a way that makes the piece accessible to as wide a readership as possible (consult others)
- Disregard notions about scale and the need to analyse data at all costs (crunching numbers won't make a weak study any better)
- Qualitative enquiries are likely to be more interesting to a casual reader ('KISS principle' applies)

Journal of Environmental Health Research



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CIEH - the 'new' JEHR

- 10 years of successful 'life' as hard-copy journal
- but, overall cost was considered excessive
- solution: bring editorial/production in-house
- Editorial team in place and reviewers being appointed
- working through papers (good news: more UK)
- Should have another suite ready for publication in September

One of the more poetic papers...



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- ***Evaluation of Physical Characteristics of Unused Nigerian Toilet Rolls and Public Health Importance of Associated Microbial Flora***
- **take-home message: 'take your own'**

Collaborative working between SIG, EHRNet, CIEH

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- SIG –organised research conference / symposium on 29th November 2013 (Univ. Of Wolverhampton)
- Various efforts by EHRNet to support would-be researchers practically to 'get writing' / 'get published'
- CIEH 'anthology' of student research projects (and others) - 'research hub'

E-book

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***Evidence, research and
publication: a guide for
environmental health
professionals***

**by Rob Couch, Jill Stewart,
Caroline Barratt, Surindar Dhesi
and Alan Page**





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