

Four Nations Health Literacy Tournament (Friendly)

aka 4th UK Health literacy Conference March 18th 2016, Glasgow “Health literacy at the Deep End”

View from a Test Match Official (TMO)

Ever since the Closing Ceremony of the 3rd UK Health Literacy event there had been a steady build up to the 2016 Health Literacy Games, hosted for the first time in Scotland. Key players gathered from across the four devolved health nations to the newly rebranded Golden Jubilee Stadium (formerly the Beardmore) in Clydebank. The place was buzzing, in part due to a huge rival contingent from the Glasgow Orthopaedic Research Initiative (GLORI).



This was a nervous first time for me officiating at such a major event but comforting to meet up with seasoned-pro Dr Jo Protheroe from Team England, along with other members of the organising committee at the pre-tournament dinner at [Roastit Bubbly Jocks](#). Fantastic also to chat with old friends such as Jonathan Berry and Gill Rowlands. Nerves must have been high at the pre-tournament breakfast the following morning when I poured coffee over my official match suit trousers, whilst filling the cup of veteran England International Dr Sue Roberts.

Crowds filled into the floodlit Arcoona Suite for the Opening Ceremony. Dr Jo (Three-hats) Protheroe gave a warm welcome and handed over to Liz Sadler, Deputy Director of Scottish Government’s Planning and Quality Division. She was a last minute substitution for Maureen Watt MSP, Minister for Public Health, who sadly had to cancel because of illness. Liz expertly set the scene of Clydebank’s, rich past but also the social and economic struggles it now faces in our post-industrial age. She reminded us how these social challenges impact on people’s health and those with the lowest health literacy and support suffer the most. She urged us all to share in Scotland’s ambition to enable all of us to be a health literate society and our part in helping to bring out the best, in those that struggle the most, to live well. She also crucially reminded us that the boyband, Wet Wet Wet, were an intrinsic part of Clydebank’s cultural heritage.

After forgoing the national anthems, I brought play under way at about 10.15. Team Scotland had won the toss and local hero [Prof Graham Watt](#) kicked deep. He challenged us to think what Health literacy really means. He gave us a stark reminder

of the key role that primary care has in responding to the challenges that health and wellbeing place on people living in deprived communities. Helping people requires investing in time and continuity to ensure empathic relationships. Primary care is a natural hub to build connections of health and social support for people and communities which is key for people with the highest health literacy needs.

England's skipper [Jo Protheroe](#) then took procession taking play back up to half way. She shared her research that she had done with England & British health literacy Lion, Gill Rowlands, describing the mismatch between [the level of information compared to peoples literacy and numeracy skills](#). She then described the inspiring collective action that the community of Stoke on Trent had taken to respond to people's health literacy needs, not without mentioning the industrial legacy of Stoke's potteries. She then took a beautiful kick at goal for 3 points with a quick-thinking reference to local pop-legend Robbie Williams.

This brought Northern Ireland into proceedings with Dr Bernadette Cullen from [Belfast Healthy Cities](#). She gave a fantastic presentation of their journey in addressing health literacy in response to Phase VI (2014-18) of the WHO Healthy Cities Initiative. She described the city wide collaboration of innovative stakeholders that had been brought together to make the case for change, map what they currently provide and plan areas for development. I couldn't help notice that in one of her photos there was a picture of one of Scotland's health literacy heroes Christine Hoy, on loan to Team NI! I was also impressed by the linkage with music legend, Van Morrison

The ball was then fed to Welsh international [Prof Adrian Edwards](#). He got off to a great start bringing the crowd to their feet evoking the Welsh singing talents of Katherine Jenkins, Bryn Terfel and, of course, Tom Jones. He initially slipped a dummy by giving the impression they were early on in their health literacy journey in public health policy terms, involving scoping the levels of health literacy in Wales. He then gained several yards, pushing deep into opposition territory, describing their quite considerable action and implementation around shared decision making, the pioneering Prudent Medicine programme and engagement with Ophelia. Unfortunately with the clock ticking down I had to blow the whistle for a lively panel discussion.

We were all hugely impressed by the quality of play from all sides. The players were clapped off for coffee, muffins and melon. As match official I was relieved that it had passed without too much incident.

The next phase of play took us into the parallel sessions where I could relax and spectate from the touch line. Some of the rooms were standing room only but I found space in the Health Literacy and Intellectual Disabilities match. I was pleased to watch the talented Dominic Jarrett, wearing the NHS Ayrshire and Arran jersey, talking about making health information, literacy accessible. He emphasised the importance of design innovation. I then watched the equally talented and seasoned health literacy pro Eileen McCutcheon, also in NHS Ayrshire and Arran colours, brought in as a late substitute for Clare Black. She described their work on developing an action plan to address health literacy locally. Was thinking we must offer Eileen a call up to the national squad and utilise her skill and talent.

I then “teleported” into the Critical and Communicative Health Literacy rubber which was in full swing just in time to catch Dr Evelyn McElhinney aka @Kalipizzaro describing her immersion in 3D virtual worlds and the insights she had on how it meets people’s health literacy needs. It was a sober reminder how disabling and restrictive life in the real world can be for some and how technology can give a new life to people. Also highlighted the challenges we have in making the real world easier for people.

During lunch I was having a good chin wag with NHS Northumbria and England international, Dr Simon Eaton. Half way through I got tapped on the shoulder by Dr Catherine Calderwood, currently well in to her first season as CMO for Scotland. I think I rudely left Simon in half sentence (apologies Simon) as needed a precious few minutes to go through the second half rules with Catherine.

The second half got underway with a brief tribute to the work of the great US international health literacy legend, Professor Dean Schillinger. He has been working with [Youth Speaks](#) and [The Bigger Picture](#) which serves to empower the voice of people from disadvantaged communities to speak out, through poetry and verse, about the health issues they face. We watched the powerful video by Youth Speaks poet Gabriel Cortez talking about how the hegemony of the sugar drinks industry is allegedly contributing to the “epidemic” of type 2 Diabetes. The video is called [“Perfect Soldiers”](#) Dean has been measuring the impact of people from these communities spreading their messages in schools. I’m not sure he’s been able to publish his findings as he has to fight off legal challenges from the industry. David and Goliath stuff.

The ball was then passed to Catherine Calderwood who provocatively suggested that Scotland was well in the lead in terms of implementing person-centred care. She then began to describe the conversation she has started in Scotland about [Realistic Medicine](#) to rebalance healthcare in order to reduce harm and variation from overdiagnosis and overtreatment. At the heart of this is recognising that people - formerly known as patients - can be supported to have an active and lead role in decisions about their care based on their personal preferences and circumstances. She warmly acknowledged that all of us addressing health literacy are leaders in informing and influencing the systems and values change that will be needed to support this relational shift in the roles of people and professionals. She recognised the important contribution that communities and non-statutory resources play in promoting more than medicine and the strong connections that need to be made. It was an inspiring performance that had supporters from all sides on their feet as she ran the full length of the pitch, neatly sidestepping a potentially dangerous high tackle from Public Health England (ironically a question about contact rugby in school children), before scoring



a converted try under the posts. She graciously acknowledged the assist from her editor-in-chief, Dr Christine Gregson.

The buoyant crowd retired for coffee before re-entering the competition in the workshops. I was rather partisan and chaired the Team Scotland workshop looking at the exciting work that was being done in implementing the actions described in Scotland's Health Literacy Plan [Making it Easy](#). Pleased to see key players Kate Burton, Lindsey Murphy and Phyllis Easton demonstrating their work, commitment and leadership.

My colleague Blythe Robertson was battling it out in the [Ophelia](#) workshop, alongside Welsh health literacy star Jess Svetz and England's Simon Eaton. The match was officiated by Sue Roberts and featured Australian internationals Prof Richard Osborne and Alison Beauchamp.



From the post- tournament briefing (in the bar) I learned that the other workshops on Sexual Health Literacy, featuring local researcher Ingrid Young and Canadian pioneer Mark Gilbert; Learner Centred Health literacy from Janet Solla and the [CHLF](#); as well as a deeper dive in to the Belfast programme led by Anne Mccusker, had all been of extremely high quality.

Following the workshops, those that were still standing, filed in to celebrate the winner of the poster tournament. The high quality four nations displays were pipped by rising health literacy international Liesbeth de Wit from The Netherlands, looking at Community- based participatory action initiatives.

Overall it was a brilliant event, top class speakers and presenters, and uplifting to see the huge amount of health literacy research and practice that it is going on across the UK. Healthy challenge and collaboration across the four devolved health economies is a fantastic vehicle to drive responsive health literacy practice for all of us. The UK Health Literacy Group is providing energetic coordination and support in this regard and we must be hugely thankful for the valuable work that they provide. As such I wish to especially thank Jo, Gill, Bernadette, Live-streaming Emma, Eme, Cath, Janet and of course Sue Weir.

Thanks also to all the other members of the conference organising committee from across the 4 nations.

Postscript: On a personal note it was a learning experience chairing the event alongside the calm and steady Jo. As a chairing novice I think it went reasonably well. However, on the train home I realised, in the closing plenary, I had inadvertently referred to Adrian Edwards as Jonathan. I whole heartedly apologise but I must have been overly caught up in the rugby metaphor. I hope, as a Welshman, he may see it as flattering. Hopefully he will forgive me the faux pas – I have humbly sin-binned myself.

Highlights (slides) are available [here](#)

Graham Kramer 19/3/16