Engaging the public with antimicrobial resistance: methods, theory, complexity and two house rabbits

Reducing antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a major global public health concern of paramount importance. The end of effective antibiotics is a growing reality. Modern medicine, as we currently know it, will end within as little as 50 years unless the drivers of AMR can be reduced. There are major challenges with this pressing endeavour, as the drivers of AMR are particularly complex and ramified. Diverse stakeholders such as farmers, vets, pharmaceutical companies, GPs, infection prevention and control nurses all have a major part to play; as do the public.

Within the presentation I draw upon a suite of my own recent studies to illuminate the problem of AMR, the problem of the publics’ engagement with AMR, and potential ways of intervening to enhance the public’s engagement with AMR and their own stewardship behaviour. Data sets include a series of one to one interviews with the pet owning public (n=23) and companion animal vets (n=16), focus groups with members of the public (n=2), a survey of the general public (n=261) and a systematic review of the effectiveness of interventions to increase the public’s awareness and engagement with AMR (K=20). Across these data sets diverse analytic approaches are combined to best effect including interpretative phenomenological analysis, narrative analysis, visual affective analyses and the behaviour change wheel.

AMR is the product of a complex adaptive system. Changing this system to elicit cultural change will require innovative, complementary and co-ordinated interventions. Health psychology has a key role to play in implementing its repertoire of diverse methods, theories and interventions.

Professor Flowers is a Fellow of the Academy of Social Science, an HCPC Registered Health Psychologist and a BPS Chartered Psychologist. He holds a Personal Chair in Public Health Psychology. Professor Flowers leads the Public Health research at Glasgow Caledonian University. Currently he has a number of projects mostly focusing upon aspects of infectious disease prevention. These include developing interventions to improve partner notification following diagnosis with a
sexually transmitted infection, reducing the drivers of antimicrobial resistance amongst the pet owning public, increasing the acceptability of screening for healthcare associated infections. Overall his work addresses the use of mixed methods in understanding people’s health behaviours and designing and evaluating interventions to improve health and well-being. He is currently as associate editor for the British Journal of Health Psychology, he is also on the editorial boards of 'Health: an interdisciplinary journal for the social study of health, illness and medicine', 'Journal of Health Psychology', 'Psychology and Sexualities' and 'The Journal for the international AIDS Society' and 'Frontiers in Public Health'.