



*for* treatments that work  
*for* science and integrity in healthcare

Registered Charity No 1003392

[www.healthwatch-uk.org](http://www.healthwatch-uk.org)

### HealthWatch Chair's report October 2021

This has been a steady year. HealthWatch's holds its first hybrid (mixed in person and virtual) AGM thanks to the continuing pandemic and mitigation via vaccinations and other precautions and moves to the RSM as a more accessible venue.

#### Continuing activities: Routine, Responsive and Proactive

**Membership:** numbers remain constant

**Trustees:** continue to give their volunteer service with good attendance over Zoom. With inevitable turnover we are sad to say goodbye and many thanks to the irreplaceable Anne Raikes who is stepping down as Treasurer after managing our finances so prudently for so many years.

**Committee meetings:** we have met together six times with other occasional meetings on specific subjects. The process of writing job roles and tighter governance grinds slowly forward.

**Google Group:** This has grown slightly and continues to have largely respectful but robust internal discussions, especially about the nature of diagnoses, harms of treatments, medically unexplained symptoms and NICE's stand-off with Royal Colleges.

**Website:** The newsletter & website remain an excellent source of information going to subscribers, students, media and medical schools. We have increased the number of Twitter followers. Many of our members are active in 'Medical Twitter'.

**Youtube channel:** In the last year we have livestreamed Award lectures which can be found on the site alongside the 2015 Saatchi debate.

**Newsletter:** Amongst news, book reviews and special articles, highlights this year on transparency campaign success; breast cancer surgery advance; pseudoscience kills; the case for a register of doctors' interests: shocking findings in the private healthcare sector; ME and why it is not only drugs and devices that can harm; trouble with nutrition research; historical quackery; whistleblowing and retraction; Covid-19 and fermented foods; antidepressant overprescription; the dark side of biomedical research; children's orthodontics; alternative medicine and women's healthcare needs

	2020-21 AGM	2019-20 AGM	2018-19 AGM	2017-18 AGM
Membership numbers (total)	229	232	212	231
Google Group members (total)	66	60	54	-
Twitter followers	1292	1185	979	842
Healthwatch UK youtube channel (views)	764	-	-	-
Cumulative HW Committee threads	3021	2416	1845	460
Cumulative Tweets (~500/ year)	2886	2648	2169	1630

**Student Award:** An enormous amount of work goes into running the unique & successful competition which continues, with winners & runners up now kindly sponsored by the Royal College of Surgeons. A student group, working with Andrew Fulton, is producing an education resource, compiling material to help students read and critically analyse research protocols for flaws

**Annual Award:** In view of both the pandemic and 30th birthday, the Committee decided to give two awards this year (1) 30th Birthday Award to Professor David Spiegelhalter who spoke about 'naughty umbers' and the (2) *Annual Award* and we look forward to hearing from the excellent communicator and member of Independent SAGE, Professor Christina Pagel.

**Consultations:** Roger Fiskien collated, wrote and made submissions to: NICE, on shared decision making; Department of Health, on a proposal for a Patient Safety Commissioner; House of Commons Science & Technology Committee, on Reproducibility in Research (Peter Wilmshurst helped in compiling a compelling argument for better investigation and prosecution of fraud); UK National Screening Committee, on public involvement; NICE: update of guidelines for elective caesarean section; DHSC women's health strategy; the Professional Standards Authority on proposals to reform its Accredited Registers programme and the MHRA on a proposed strategy for patient and public involvement.

**Research Fund:** Awarded a new grant to Margaret McCartney at University of Dundee to supervise students on a project investigating the public's access to declarations of interests, and approved a no-cost extension due to Covid to Till Brucker's transparency project.

**Charity Commission;** Partnering with the Good Thinking Society, there has been publicity in Private Eye. Les Rose also compiled a record of nearly a decade's worth of complaints about charities peddling pseudoscience and the lack of perceived action by the Commission on the public interest. The CEO rejected HW's briefing paper. We will next approach the Chair or new Secretary of State at Dept of Culture, Media & Sport who oversee.

**MHRA and devices.** We had correspondence about bioresonance machines, and also sent a joint letter with GTS about thermal imaging to Matt Hancock. We will keep a watchful eye on nutraceuticals.

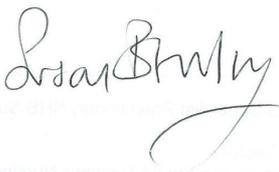
**Misleading advertising.** A member had success with Lloyds Pharmacy helping to persuade them to withdraw misleading claims about anti-virals.

**Open Government project:** Chair and NL editor contributed to work which aims to use open data and participatory, accountable public decision-making in order to build stronger healthcare systems

**General Medical Council:** Chair & President had a meeting with GMC to discuss (1) sex/ gender markers where they appear to have made changes without legal advice or equality assessments, (2) a register of interests as recommended following Cumberlege Report Do No Harm (esp from devices), which they appear keen to devolve to employers.

**History reminiscence:** Inspired by early founder members (Caroline Richmond & Vincent Marks), a Zoom reminiscence was held to record HWs origins, discuss archives and an article. More may follow.

**Name change looking forward:** As explained at last year's AGM, our problem of appearing fusty and having been drowned by the government's HEALTHWATCH has not been resolved. The committee examined favoured terms, but with difficulty in overlap and availability of domain names for a website and social media. With committee assent, an eventual name is being proffered to be voted on at the AGM.



Susan Bewley  
Chair of Trustees, HealthWatch UK

3 October 2021