

spected researchers from a multitude of backgrounds, including epidemiology, psychology, human development and behaviour, engineering, public health, emergency medicine, economics, public policy, evaluation and education. In addition, SMARTRISK has a full-time PhD Manager of Research and Evaluation, who works with respected, independent consultants to design and implement comprehensive evaluations of our programs, including the SMARTRISK Heroes show.

SMARTRISK is committed to building on the current capacity of the existing injury prevention research community. To that end, we have secured a private-public sector partnership between SMARTRISK, the Canadian Injury Research Network (CIRnet), the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) and the Insurance Bureau of Canada. SMARTRISK will facilitate a 6-member multidisciplinary team — chaired by 2 of Canada's most respected researchers, Dr. Cam Mustard at the Institute for Work and Health and Dr. Rob Brison from Queen's University — tasked with engaging researchers in a priority-setting and capacity-demonstrating process over the coming year.

SMARTRISK does not receive any public funding for the staging and delivery of SMARTRISK Heroes. All past and current evaluations have been financed from corporations such as Ford of Canada and Royal & SunAlliance.

Some of the projects that SMARTRISK is working on do receive government funding. One example of public-sector funding is our long-standing partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, which predates the most recent funding announcement of 1999. These recent funds, which have been entrusted to SMARTRISK, have been leveraged with private-sector funding and utilized throughout the province. Working in partnership with ministry officials from the Public Health and the Emergency Health Services branches, we have supported a multitude of injury prevention activities, in-

cluding providing scholarships and bursaries to Ontario injury prevention practitioners to attend national and international conferences as well as academic prizes to budding injury prevention researchers, to name just two. Regular meetings are held with ministry officials to review our progress to date on specified deliverables and to develop ongoing plans based on provincial stakeholder feedback. A number of communication vehicles exist to provide provincial stakeholders with regular updates on our progress as well as to provide opportunities for input.

SMARTRISK has also brokered private-sector funding to support the Atlantic Network for Injury Prevention, the British Columbia Injury Prevention Research Centre and the Injury Prevention Centre in Manitoba to support economic burden studies in their respective provinces.

The reputation of a charity is its very lifeblood, and the publication of unsubstantiated claims runs the risk of threatening its continued existence. We therefore appreciate this opportunity to set the record straight.

Carol Jardine

Chair
Board of Directors
SMARTRISK
Toronto, Ont.

Reference

1. Pless B. Taking risks with injury prevention [editorial]. *CMAJ* 2002;167(7):767-8.

[The author responds:]

Although readers must decide for themselves whether my commentary¹ “contained numerous inaccuracies” or “called the integrity of the organization into question,” clearly, I disagree with the first point, although one of my references (4) was not a good example of an evaluation study. As for integrity, I agree that SMARTRISK has many good intentions, as the letter from Carol Jardine indicates. However, in view of SMARTRISK's awareness of “the need for evidence-based action,” it seems reasonable to question the lack of

readily available, peer-reviewed evaluations of Heroes, its flagship program. Indeed, the basic “risk-taking” message, my overriding concern, begs for evidence that it is not harmful. These expectations seem entirely reasonable given the Research Advisory Committee that has been assembled and the staff committed to this end. These are resources few other organizations have the luxury of devoting to evaluation.

The paragraph regarding SMARTRISK's relations with the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care lists activities that may be commendable but that also deserve formal evaluation. If SMARTRISK aims to be in the vanguard of safety groups in Canada, it must use some of the generous funds the ministry gave it to evaluate programs and thereby provide guidance for others. But any evaluation that is not fully shared with others through peer-reviewed publication is of limited value.

The main target of my commentary was not SMARTRISK but the ministry. I was troubled by the ministry giving so much money with so little required by way of justification or assurances of productivity, and apparently without considering the possibility that some of what SMARTRISK does may not have the intended effect.

Barry Pless

Professor of Pediatrics, Epidemiology and Biostatistics
McGill University
Montréal, Que.

Reference

1. Pless B. Taking risks with injury prevention [editorial]. *CMAJ* 2002;167(7):767-8.

[SMARTRISK replies:]

Following from Barry Pless' response,¹ I believe there are 4 facts that must be shared.

1. There *are* evaluations of the SMARTRISK Heroes program, including 2 comprehensive evaluations conducted by qualified, independent organizations.^{2,3} The evaluations are consistent in their results, indicating

that the majority of students who attended a SMARTRISK Heroes program:

- expressed a new awareness of the implications of risk as it relates to injuries
- indicated a willingness to modify certain behaviours to reduce the prospect of sustaining an injury
- learned and retained core messages and had a better understanding of risk as it relates to causing injury well after the Heroes presentation.

2. Our work with the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has nothing to do with the Heroes program. Government funding is usually clearly defined and earmarked for very specific activities to meet certain objectives. It is not for us to dictate to any government ministry or agency how it should spend its money; rather, our job is to ensure that injury prevention programs and initiatives continue to move ahead in breadth and scope.

3. Sharing evaluations “through peer-reviewed publication” is a noble concept that is more an academic exercise than a professional necessity. Most well-conducted evaluations of programs actually do not appear in peer-reviewed journals. Evaluations of our programs are shared widely through conferences and other appropriate fora. The point, simply, is that it is more important to

have sound, reliable, accessible and ongoing evaluations than to have the satisfaction of authoring a paper.

4. Pless notes that the “main target” of his article was the ministry, not SMARTRISK. As professionals committed to preventing injuries and saving lives, we should not be “targeting” any person or organization. Rather, governments, academics, the not-for-profit sector and the private sector should be working together, more closely than ever, to help individuals and organizations change attitudes and behaviours to further reduce unnecessary injuries.

Carol Jardine

Chair
Board of Directors
SMARTRISK
Toronto, Ont.

References

1. Pless B. Taking risks with injury prevention [editorial]. *CMAJ* 2002;167(7):767-8.
2. Smaller World Communications. *SMARTRISK: an Evaluation of HEROES, Final Report*. Toronto: SMARTRISK; 1999. Available: www.smartrisk.ca/SRHeroes/SRHeval.html (accessed 2003 Mar 21).
3. Green J, Cambridge D. *An Independent Evaluation of HEROES*. Leeds, UK: Leeds Health Authority and The Metropolitan University of Leeds; 2001. Available: www.smartrisk.ca/SRHeroes/SRHeval.html (accessed 2003 Mar 21).

Risk is an everyday reality of life¹ and there is a general understanding that youth risk behaviours are an in-

tegral part of development.^{2,3} Hence the need to understand risks and how to manage them.⁴ From the tone, academic content and examples used by Barry Pless in his commentary,⁵ a reader might conclude that he believes we should stop taking risks instead of learning to become better risk managers.

Prevention efforts could be informed by furthering our understanding of the complexity of risk behaviour. A challenge faced by health promotion personnel in general is to make young people aware of the possibility of the various dangers in their lives, particularly when these dangers are part of normal life experiences.⁶ Research has demonstrated that people in general are poor estimators of personal risk⁷ and tend to rely on heuristics to deal with everyday life experiences.⁸ Adolescents are also subject to these limitations, with the added challenge of having to cope with multiple developmental forces.^{9,10}

Pless' commentary could have opened a critical debate on a key policy area, that of risk and its management, and focused it on injury prevention. Two recent publications underscore the importance of the risk-management policy debate.^{11,12} Through various initiatives, including its Research Advisory Committee, SMARTRISK is working

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