

# What is the impact of running a public health blog in New Zealand?

**Kate Sloane, Associate Professor Nick Wilson, Professor Tony Blakely,**

University of Otago, Wellington, Department of Public Health, Wellington, New Zealand

Burden of Disease Epidemiology,  
and Cost-Effectiveness Programme

**bode<sup>3</sup>**

Burden of Disease Epidemiology, Equity  
and Cost Effectiveness Programme



W E L L I N G T O N

# Public Health Expert Blog

- <https://blogs.otago.ac.nz/pubhealthexpert/>



bode<sup>3</sup>

Burden of Disease Epidemiology, Equity  
and Cost Effectiveness Programme



W E L L I N G T O N

# Why write a blog?

- Enables information to be distributed in a timely manner (new research findings)
- Informs audiences such as policy makers and health workers
- Promotes active discussion on topical public health issues (in media & blogosphere)

# How we do it

- Two academics (Blakely & Wilson) regularly scan for relevant topics that arise from routine work.
- University colleagues may also suggest ideas for blogs & write these themselves

# How we do it

- Blogs are crafted up, average time to write up: between 30-60 mins.
- Blog administrator (Sloane) processes the raw text using WordPress, uploads them and posts when timely.
- Blog posting is “tweeted” – @BlakelyTony

# How we do it

- Once a blog is posted, people are able to write comments and ask questions about the blog content.
- Feedback is moderated to ensure it has meaningful content (most is spam).

# Examples of blog post topic areas

Major risk factors:

- Obesity, Nutrition
- Alcohol, Tobacco



Major disease groupings:

- Cancer, Cardiovascular disease

**bode<sup>3</sup>**

Burden of Disease Epidemiology, Equity  
and Cost Effectiveness Programme



W E L L I N G T O N

# Subscribers

- There are over 225 subscribers
- Email addresses from universities, DHBs, parliament, government and personal addresses



# Analytics

- There have been 64 blogs since July 2013 (bit over 1 per week)
- Google analytics tracks the hits of the blogs

# Syndicated to SciBlogs

- SciBlogs – NZ’s leading science blogging site:  
<http://sciblogs.co.nz/>
- 11<sup>th</sup> most visited blog site in NZ (41,000 visits & 52,000 page views per month)
- Probably the major source of PHE blog viewings

# Most popular blogs

- A new review on **dietary fats** putting its findings in context – 2035 hits  
<https://blogs.otago.ac.nz/pubhealthexpert/2014/03/18/a-new-review-on-dietary-fats-putting-its-findings-in-context/>
- Action needed to halt NZs **obesity epidemic** themes from a big food symposium – 1948 hits  
<https://blogs.otago.ac.nz/pubhealthexpert/2014/02/19/action-needed-to-halt-new-zealands-obesity-epidemic-themes-from-big-food-symposium/>
- **Obesity** at last on government agenda but will healthy families NZ be good enough – 1524 hits  
<https://blogs.otago.ac.nz/pubhealthexpert/2014/02/07/obesity-at-last-on-government-agenda-but-will-healthy-families-nz-be-good-enough/>

# Most popular blogs - continued

- **Climate change** and cherry blossom - 1464 hits  
<https://blogs.otago.ac.nz/pubhealthexpert/2014/04/03/climate-change-and-cherry-blossom/>
- **NZ E-cigarette trial** in *Lancet* keeping it in perspective – 1177 hits  
<https://blogs.otago.ac.nz/pubhealthexpert/2013/09/09/new-zealand-e-cigarette-trial-in-lancet-keeping-it-in-perspective/>

# Who might find the blog useful?

- Policymakers, politicians
- Media
- Public health professionals
- Public more generally

# Outcomes from blog posts

- One blog appears to have resulted in a briefing session with a multi-party group of parliamentarians (food/drink taxes)
- Several appear to have resulted in media interviews & subsequent coverage

# Outcomes from blog posts

- Two have generated related op-eds.
- Has triggered requests by other organisations for the use of material in their dissemination of information such as brochures.

# Blog posts vs Media Releases

- Blog posts – generally more for the public health audience.
- But sometimes both have been done simultaneously – with occasional evidence of synergies



# Blog posts & journal outputs

- Some blog posts have been turned into NZMJ letters – which means that the information can be accessed via Medline / PubMed

# Implications?

- Other public health groups (academia & NGOs) could consider trialling blog sites & linking to SciBlogs.

# Implications?

- But scepticism on value should continue relative to use of:
  - media releases
  - op-eds
  - “viewpoint” articles or letters to journals
  - presentations
  - other forms of dissemination

# Conclusions

- Public Health Expert blog appears to have been successful to date for disseminating public health science
- But the blogosphere is still developing – and its value for disseminating science & public health knowledge remains somewhat uncertain.