

INIsPHO SEMINAR SERIES

Health Analysts' Special Interest Group

25 March 2008

Who am I?

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What am I?

Senior Research Fellow

Where do I work?

Small Area Health Research Unit (SAHRU)/
Primary Care Research Centre

Department of Public Health & Primary Care
Trinity College Dublin

Qualifications

1998 - BE (Agriculture & Food)

2001 – MSc (Health Services)

2007 – PhD (Deprivation methodology)

What do I do?

Analyse health, obviously

Research focus is almost, but not entirely,
on health

Experiences

MSc

- Access to health services
- Resource allocation

Lessons

- No small area health data available
- Benefits of mapping/GIS

Experiences

Analysing mortality data

- Urban-rural district level
- Social class differentials

Lessons

- Potential incompatibility of health & demographic data
- Unannounced changes to definitions

Info2000

- EU-funded project
- Defining health-related small area indicators

Lessons

- No small area health data available
- Benefits of collaboration/exposure to expertise

EuroHeis

- EU-funded project
- Effects of point sources of pollution

Lessons

- No small area health data available
- Careful what conclusions you draw

Askeaton

- Point source of pollution
- Assessing possible clustering of mortality

Lessons

- People might not believe what you tell them – emotive issues can cloud people's judgement

Eurocat

- EU-funded project
- Scanning for clusters of congenital anomalies

Lessons

- Theory and practice can be quite distinct
- Just as a cluster might not be a cluster, 'not a cluster' might be a cluster

Opiate user capture-recapture study

- Determining prevalence of opiate use
- Combining 3 datasets

Lessons

- Difficulties in address coding
- Contrasts to preconceptions – the power of mapping

Experiences

Mapping prisoners

- Collaboration with UCD
- Small area mapping of prisoners

Lessons

- Deprivation isn't just about health
- Casting areas in a poor light...

Deprivation Index

- Small area socio-economic label
- Widely used in health applications

Lessons

- Once in the public domain, people can do what they like with it

GMS prescribing data

- Comparing prescribing behaviour by deprivation level

Lessons

- Large datasets can hide worrying facts
- Errors in data can give misleading results
 - little control in secondary data analysis

Experiences

GP locations

- Mapping of practices
- Regional variation in accessibility

Lessons

- No definitive central database of services
- Nuances of regional variation

Location-allocation study

- HRB funded study
- Finding optimal locations for a service

Lessons

- Absolute and relative difference between 'optimal' and 'reality'
- Important to know where the real solution sits in the range of potential solutions

Hanley Report analysis

- Assessing impact of reducing A&E sites
- Wide public debate/interest

Lessons

- Sometimes a simple mapping exercise is sufficient to make a point

Radiation Therapy service changes

- Analysing travel times to potential sites
- No modelling required!

Lessons

- Simplest approach can be transparent
- Difficulty of conveying nuances of accessibility

St. James's radiation therapy bid

- Promote site based on accessibility and socio-demographic

Lessons

- No comparator sites
- Duck when you hear the cross-fire!

Experiences

National paediatric hospital

- Compute travels times to each site
- Small area population projections

Lessons

- Leave no stone unturned in a controversial project
- Detractors always shout loudest

Maternity hospital review

- Travel times to potential sites
- Population projections

Lessons

- Models can be confusing to a non-expert
- The need for joined-up planning

Experiences

PhD

- Deprivation index methodology
- Urban-rural indices

Lessons

- Don't bite off more than you can chew
- Sometimes you just have to let go...

What is a health analyst?

According to Lorraine:

“A health analyst is someone who collates, manages, analyses, interprets and disseminates health related data.”

⇒ An umbrella term for a disparate group of individuals

Where are they to be found?

- Universities
- HSE
- Department of Health & Children
- HRB
- CSO
- ESRI
- a wide range of state or state-sponsored agencies
- Private sector (consultancy, insurance, etc)

Careers

- Public v private sector
- Clear grade structure in public sector does not necessarily translate to semi-state agencies
- Sources of funding (HRB, EU, SFI)
 - Some positions are dependent on continued funding
- Sustainability

Careers

Reasons to be pessimistic...

- Increasing pressure on health services and a concentration of resources on front-line staff

Reasons to be cheerful...

- An increasing awareness that good service planning and delivery requires a good understanding of what's going on

Careers

Risk of professional isolation

- Important to be exposed to experience and expertise
- Can't expect to do everything all of the time
- The requirement to stay up-to-date

General thoughts

Potential benefits

versus

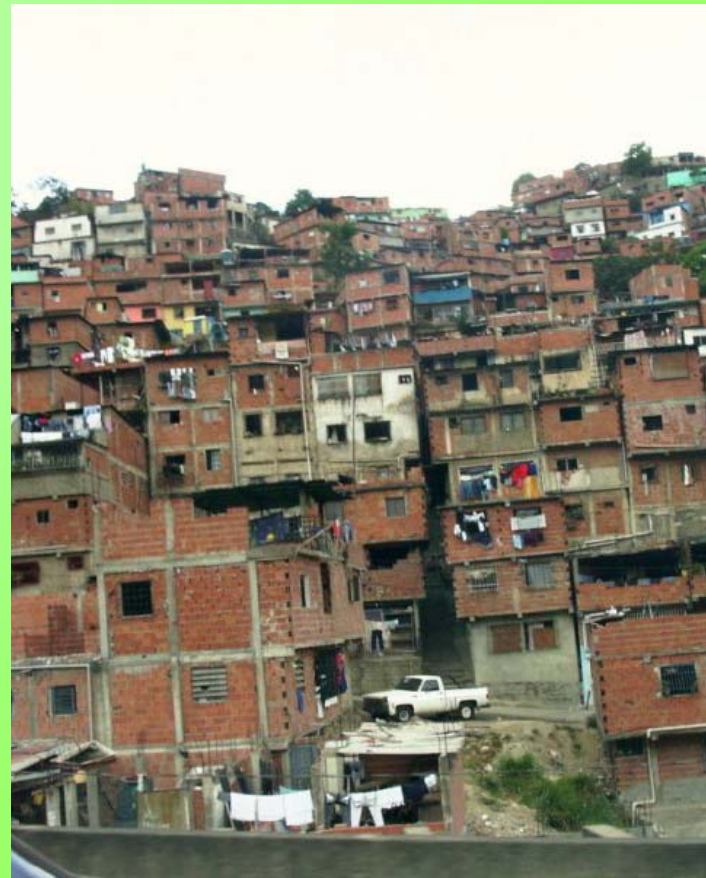
Potential damage

General thoughts

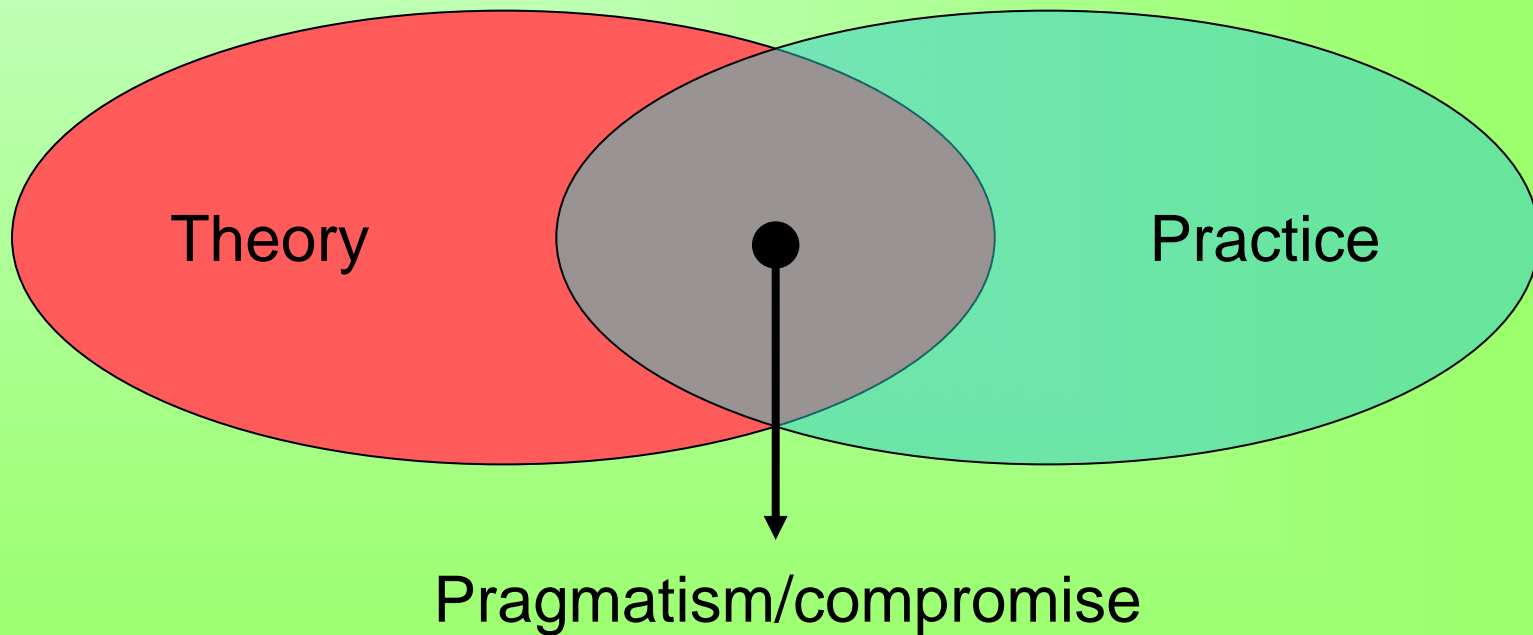
Theory



Practice



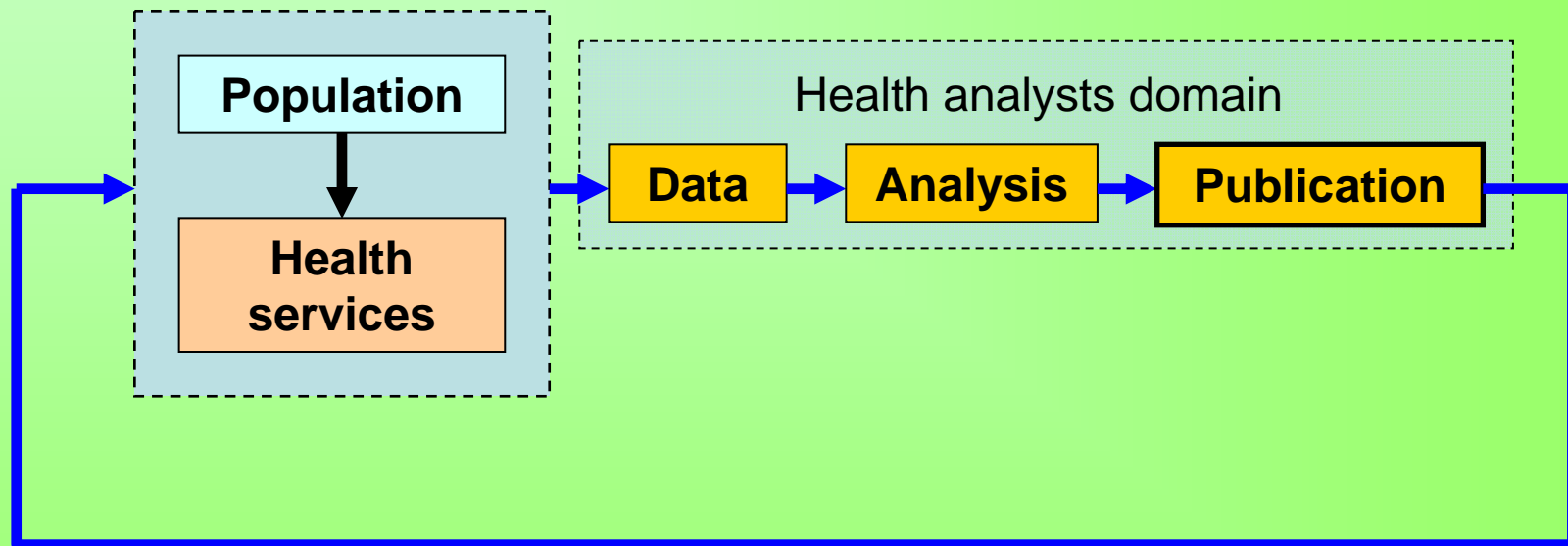
General thoughts



General thoughts

The importance of publication

General thoughts





End