

Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition

Paper for information: FSA Update on Promotion of Foods to Children

Agenda item: 12

Please see attached paper for information on “Does food promotion influence children”.

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Does Food Promotion Influence Children

- **“Does Food Promotion Influence Children”** produced for the Food Standards Agency by Professor Gerard Hastings and his team at the University of Strathclyde Centre for Social Marketing was published in September 2003
- The review examined existing evidence on the way foods are promoted to children, and the possible link between promotional activity and child eating patterns.
- The report was discussed at the October SACN meeting where members praised the findings and agreed it was an important report with firm, clear messages. A member requested a further meeting. This was held in December with the Chairman and five committee members. Further comments were also given by e-mail to the secretariat. Members agreed that there was sufficient evidence that advertising influences behaviour, but raised a number of concerns and listed a number of actions. The resulting minutes were agreed by those attending the December meeting and are attached at Annex 1.
- Prior to the above meeting, on 9 November the FSA made available on its website an options paper for action on the promotion and advertising of foods that could improve children’s diet and health (www.food.gov.uk/promotion/options/). Action under consideration includes research, building on existing guidance, best practice and new regulation. A public debate on the issue involving all stakeholders, including members of the public, was held on 27 January. Further reports will be given in the regular Government Updates agenda item.
- Annex 2 shows points made at the SACN meeting of 23/02/04 and detailed by SACN member Christine Gratus.

Annex 1**SACN Food Promotion 5-12-03. Telephone conference minutes****Participants:**

Professor Alan Jackson (Chair)
Professor Annie Anderson
Miss Gill Fine
Professor Andrew Rugg Gunn
Ms Stella Walsh
Dr Tony Williams

Secretariat:

Dr Alison Tedstone (FSA)
Dr Adrienne Cullum (DH)

Chair's introduction - focus of SACN deliberations

Chair proposed discussions should focus on the nature, strength and quality of evidence on food promotion to children and its effects and whether any additional evidence is required.

Discussion

It was noted that while it is known that promotions have an impact on food choice the exact extent of the effect remains uncertain. Food advertising was part of the broader issue of food marketing and only one of a number of factors influencing the purchasing and consumption of food.

Review

Members considered the Young and Hastings reviews to be complementary. Each provided different perspectives on developmental psychology and other pressures eg peer pressure.

Evidence base

Members agreed that there was sufficient evidence that advertising influences behaviour and that the evidence for a causal link was probable. However, Members recognised that there were limitations to the evidence base particularly and some caution should be exercised in the uncritical extrapolation of study findings to all situations. Members raised a number of particular concerns:

- The majority of the studies were from North America. It had been assumed that US data applied directly to the UK but it remained unclear how reasonable this assumption is and what importance should be given to obtaining UK data.
- Members noted that the development of obesity in the UK appeared to be following the pattern which has been seen in the USA. Although there is a paucity of data from the UK, the available evidence supports the conclusions

drawn from experiences in the USA. It was noted that for advertising on television, the UK differed from USA in that public service television channels did not broadcast adverts (BBC – 50% of pre-school children watch Ceebies, although BBC programmes also linked to food promotions eg Tweenies).

- The patterns of advertising and their relative contribution to promotion and marketing strategies have changed over time, whereas the studies reviewed were quite old.
- Lack of evidence on the impact of age on the effect of advertising, particularly on the very young children.
- There was limited data on other forms of food promotion and marketing eg retail promotions and sponsorship.
- Difficult to extrapolate from the findings – an intervention could have paradoxical effects (eg L Birch work).
- Limited evidence of impact on health. However, if advertising increases consumption of sugars then this is likely to be detrimental to health in that increased frequency and consumption is associated with greater dental caries.

Intervention – examples of voluntary and legislative action

Members discussed the evidence for relative benefits of voluntary codes of practice and/or legislative action.

- Advertising on Swedish TV during children’s programming has been banned. Although the effect has not been evaluated the impact may be limited as only 25% of TV watched was eligible for the ban.
- Tobacco promotion can be used as an example of voluntary and legislative action but unclear whether there was direct impact on consumption or reverse causation.

2 Australian studies and 1 UK study found that schools barring confectionery consumption found favourable effects on oral health; an example of the benefit of voluntary action (Fanning et al 1969, Roder 1973 and Pengelly and Smyth 1972)

- Baby milk promotions as example –International Code (which virtually all is countries sign up to) helpful but industry disputes definitions. - It is more than a “voluntary code” as it is ratified by governments whose performance in implementation is monitored through reporting on Convention on the Rights of the Child. In Europe of course it is partly implemented through the Infant and Follow-on Formula Regulations.
- Food labelling provides an example of voluntary code, which might be used selectively, but may need to be developed to address specific considerations, eg differentiating the carbohydrates to clarify the content of simple sugars or sucrose.

It was noted that most voluntary action is not monitored systematically such as nutritional guidelines for schools meals, and therefore it is difficult to determine either compliance or effect.

Positive messages

There are many examples of promotions that appear to effect behaviour. The promotions are rarely only simple messages or "education" but more part of carefully interventions using positive messages and behavioural theory (Agency for Healthcare, 2001). Examples of these are the Food Dudes programme (Horne et al, 1995) and a number of the NCI Five a day schools based programmes in the US (Baranowski et al, 2000, Reynolds et al, 2000) which focus on increased consumption of fruits and vegetables. It should however be noted that the impact is often fairly modest and in the order of an increase of 0.5 portions per day.

Research

Members queried whether novel research approaches could pin down the impact of promotions in a more robust way. While they were difficult to undertake, intervention studies addressing this issue were required.

Quality of advertised foods / diet

Members noted the recent introduction of the concept of "children's foods"; that is products which were specially developed and identified for consumption by children as a deliberate marketing strategy. In general these foods did not confer any health advantage, and when consumed in excess would often contribute to a poor quality diet.

The quality of "children's foods" and impact on children's diets was considered an important area for consideration. Members noted there are eating habits which are predominant with children eg soft drink consumption.

The concept of "children's foods" encourages an incorrect perception that children should eat foods which are different to the rest of the family. This is an important consideration, and there is the need to collect evidence to determine the nutrient content and quality of children's foods (eg nuggets, breakfast cereals), and their quality compared with the foods eaten by and promoted to adults. Members considered this a very important consideration and identified a need to develop suitable approaches to research which could address the different aspects of this issue. It was also noted that this work was important in the context of any compositional standards for food promotions and labelling and would feed into the current DH 'What Counts' work (for criteria for the usage of the 5 A DAY logo for composite foods), the FSA work on children's portion sizes and discussions on the EU Nutrition and Health Claims Regulation. It was proposed that SACN should be consulted/have a role in advising the FSA on the specific appropriateness of any proposed nutrition profiles and their impact on children's diets.

It was proposed that the FSA work on modelling of salt in foods could be extended to include those foods which are especially produced for, and marketed to children.

References

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Fanning E et al (1969) Med J Austral i , 1131-2

Horne PJ, Lowe CF, Fleming PF, Dowey AJ. An effective procedure for changing food preferences in 5-7-year-old children. Proceedings of the Nutrition Society 1995; 54(2):441-52.

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Roder DM (1973) Austral Dent J 18, 174-82

Annex 2

Additional points made at SACN meeting 23/02/04 and detailed by the SACN member Christine Gratus

The Hasting review focuses on academic evidence and that other evidence is available from the adverting industry. This includes composed of the brand-based studies that establish a demonstrable relationship between advertising and sales. Most of the major advertising/marketing bodies and publications have an annual award system that recognises effectiveness in their discipline or across disciplines. For example on the impact of advertising targeted at children there are award-winning papers for Walker's Crisps, Kellogg's Coco Pops, Kellogg's Real Fruit Winders, Rowntree's Fruit Pastilles, Kraft Dairylea and Tango.

The World Advertising Research Centre (www.warc.com) provides information on the Effectiveness Awards.