

## North East Medical Sociology Study Group

### Annual Report 2015/16

The North East Regional Study Group was established in late 2011 to bring together medical sociologists from the five universities in the region – Teesside, Durham, Sunderland, Northumbria and Newcastle. The group continues to thrive, and its aims are:

- to bring together researchers and others with an interest in the critical sociological study of health and health service related issues;
- to foster collaborative working between individuals and organisations;
- to offer mentoring to early career researchers and postgraduate researchers;
- to build a community of interest on specific medical sociological topics as identified by its membership;
- to bring to policy discussion and wider debate in the region a sociological understanding of health issues;
- to bolster the existence and raise the profile of medical sociology as a research discipline (and the contribution of relevant research findings to teaching) within the Higher Education institutions of the North East.

Our half day seminars held twice a year are lively and usually well attended and this is a clear indication of the high level of interest and activity in medical sociology in the region. It has also given many individuals contact with people from institutions other than their own, so the events are very beneficial to people in terms of enabling them to develop their networks. We promote the idea of the Group as being inclusive by rotating steering group meetings and events around the 5 institutions. Our membership, as measured by membership of our North East jiscmail list, currently stands at 185.

Our other focus has been on supporting and encouraging postgraduate and early career researchers. The steering group currently includes a mix of both more experience and early career researchers, and our events routinely offer the opportunity for PhD students and ECRs to present their work.

We have held two events in 2015. Our Spring event, held on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2015 was run as a joint event with Fuse, the Centre for Translational Research in Public Health, and was held at Northumbria University in Newcastle. We departed from our usual format by having two principal speakers, Professor David Byrne, Director of Postgraduate Studies in the School of Applied Social Sciences at Durham University and Dr Graham Moore, Research Fellow, DECIPHer, the Centre for the Development and Evaluation of Complex Interventions for Public Health Improvement, Cardiff University. Both spoke on the topic of evaluating complex health interventions, Dr Moore focusing specifically on the new MRC guidance for process evaluation of complex interventions. This was followed by a panel discussion on the role of Sociology and Applied Qualitative Research in Complex Interventions.

Our second half day event was held on 18th November at the University of Sunderland and focused on the timely theme of austerity, welfare, politics and the effects on health. The keynote speaker was Ted Schrecker, Professor of Global Health Policy in the Centre for Public Policy & Health at Durham University who spoke on the topic 'First, do no harm: Neoliberal epidemics and the case against social policy malpractice'. He later was joined by Rob MacDonald, Professor of Sociology at Teesside University, who spoke on the topic "Zombie slaying? The pressures and possibilities of real world research impact'. There were additional short presentations from local speakers, before all participated in a lively panel discussion to consider the extent to which academics should become advocates rather than disinterested observers.

Our next event is scheduled for 11<sup>th</sup> May 2016 and will be held at Newcastle University. The topic for this event is gender related health issues, and our keynote speaker will be Dr Carol Emslie from Glasgow Caledonian University whose presentation will be "The obvious stereotype is that straight men drink beer and gay men drink cocktails": Exploring constructions of gender identity and sexual orientation in the context of alcohol consumption.' There are to be a number of short presentations from local research academics, together with a panel discussion looking at exploring the difficulties sociologists face when working in multi-disciplinary groups looking at health related topics. Further details of the full programme will be available shortly.

There will be a further event in the autumn, date and details yet to be agreed.

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(co-convenors)