

Editorial

THERE IS A STRONG emerging consensus in the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) professions that improvements in personal hygiene can have major direct beneficial impacts on health, as well as significant non-health benefits. Consequently much effort in the sector now highlights the importance of hygiene, and many programmes and initiatives are trying to find better ways of raising standards of hygiene. This issue of *Waterlines* brings some of these examples together.

The emphasis of the papers here is mostly on hygiene in the restricted sense of personal behaviours, but inevitably this draws us into a discussion of the facilities and products which individuals need to make good hygiene possible.

An opening question regarding hygiene is 'who?' Who can most benefit from changes in hygiene practices? Who needs to practise better hygiene, both for their own benefit and for the benefit of others?

Hygiene is to a significant degree a social and not just an individual matter. My dirty hands come into contact with yours (which may be clean). A mother's dirty hands are used to prepare food and feed it to her child. A man shaking another man's hand can transfer disease pathogens to the other. Lack of proper facilities for the management of the menstrual cycle is thought to keep significant numbers of girls out of school on a regular basis, so that a whole cohort of female society is disadvantaged.

So the short answer to the question 'who?' is 'everyone' – men, women, boys, girls. But naturally the reality is rather more nuanced. Involving all members of society means designing programmes of hygiene promotion which are appropriate for different categories of participant. Among the papers in this issue, Nga Kim Nguyen focuses on women and children, while Ingeborg Krukkert et al. emphasize the importance of reaching men too. Marni Sommer focuses especially on girls who have reached the age of menstruation, with the particular needs which then follow.

Much of the work in hygiene promotion has focused on getting people to change behaviours – to wash hands at times and frequencies that they did not do previously; to observe good hygiene practices as a matter of habit. A great deal of research effort has gone into understanding what motivates people to change. Generally that motivation has been found to be less to do with any perceived health benefits and more to do with considerations of status, dignity, safety, privacy, convenience and a host of other personal and social drivers.

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In recognition of this, the emphasis in most programmes and projects has therefore shifted from health and hygiene education increasingly to hygiene promotion. Getting the messages right and communicating them in the most effective ways is therefore the name of the game nowadays. Involving those who need services and those whose existing practices are being targeted is also crucial. Several of the papers in this issue, including those mentioned and also those of Sue Coates and colleagues, Peter Morgan and Annie Shangwa, and our Crossfire debate all focus on this key area.

Arguably a somewhat neglected aspect of hygiene promotion has been the question of 'how?' Not so much how to bring about hygiene behaviour change, but how will people practise better hygiene? In other words a focus on the very practical means by which better hygiene can be practised. Clearly good hygiene is virtually inseparable from sanitation and water supply, but in the absence of running water from taps there is also the need for convenient water dispensers, soap or soap products, and other paraphernalia around handwashing. Jacqueline Devine describes WSP's work in this area, looking 'beyond tippy-taps' to the place of consumer products in encouraging improved hygiene. Peter Morgan and Annie Shangwa examine this aspect in Zimbabwean schools, and Shadi Saboori and colleagues consider the practicalities of soap supply in schools in Kenya. Marni Sommer extends this to the menstrual management facilities required in schools, emphasizing once again the essential need to involve users at the centre of the design process.

Hygiene promotion is crucial to the achievement of the health benefits of WASH programmes. It is also highly relevant to other aspects of human development such as female education, and the general safety and dignity of human beings. Many practical examples are presented in this issue of *Waterlines*, but the bigger issue is how to systematically design and deliver hygiene improvement programmes, which are fit-for-context, of sufficient duration, effective in bringing about change and which lead to sustained – indeed permanent – benefits for society. That is the big challenge for hygiene professionals.

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Competition – 'From our water correspondent'

Waterlines is looking for a regular correspondent (from 2011) working in a developing country on water and sanitation issues. Entrants should write an account (up to 800 words) of a typical day. Issues might include, for example, building or running the water supply, getting spares, facilitating hygiene or sanitation programmes, efforts to increase community accountability, etc. You can reflect on how your work affects you, and include anecdotes. Photos are welcomed.

Entries should be entitled 'From our water correspondent' and sent to Sue Cavill at suecavill@hotmail.com by 1 January 2011. The winner will receive a year's *Waterlines* subscription and £50 worth of Practical Action Publishing books. He or she will have the winning entry and three more submissions published in *Waterlines*.