

# **Can users improve official health statistics?**

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# Outline

Why was a Health Statistics User Group needed?

Establishment of the group

Activities and how they have changed

Two examples of current

# The 1980s

1981 Rayner Review led to 25 per cent cuts in spending on Government Statistical Service.

Inaccessibility of data

- Non-publication

- Ministerial press releases and news management

- Charges for publications

Misleading use of statistics to make claims about the state of the NHS.

Introduction of performance indicators

- Questions about what they measured

# The 1980s - responses



Articles to demystify misleading use of statistics

Attempts to influence professional bodies and Statistics Users Council to tackle issues

Source: Health and Social Services Journal

# Issues highlighted

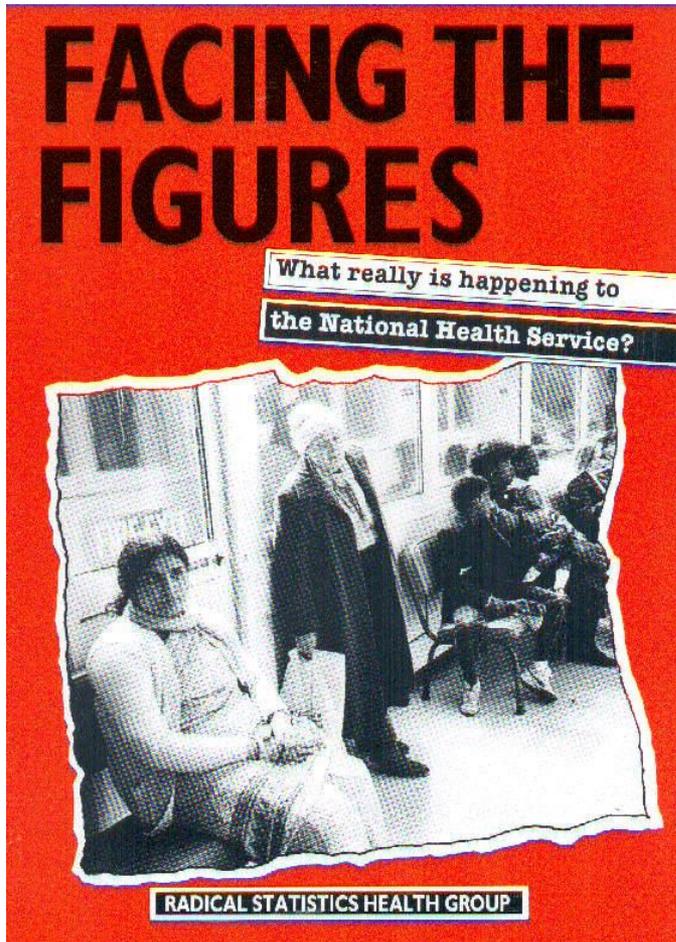
Few data were fed back to hospital and community staff who collected them.

Insufficient feedback to user organisations and lack of statistical skills in these and in the NHS.

Slimming down of government publications. Misleading use of statistics in press releases and public statements. Journalists received press releases without associated publications.

Researchers needed machine readable data but journalists needed accessible data on paper. No one wanted microfiches.

# Meanwhile



Channel Four 'Despatches' programme 'Cooking the books' gave examples of misuse of official statistics, mainly on health services.

Articles on subject in broadsheet papers.

# Radical Statistics initiative, 1991

## Official statistics: do we need a new agenda?

Two discussion meetings organised by Radical Statistics

### Northern meeting:

**Thursday May 30 7.30 pm**

**Room E1, Main Building, University of Bradford**

Opening speaker:

**Cathy Marsh,**  
Manchester University

### Southern meeting:

**Monday June 17 6.00 pm**

**Manson Theatre, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine**

Opening speakers:

**Muriel Nissel**  
Social researcher and former government statistician  
**David Taylor,**  
Unemployment Unit  
**Andrew Philpott Morgan,**  
former government statistician  
**Peter Davies,**  
Deputy Editor, Health Service Journal  
**Elizabeth Chapman,**  
Librarian, Institute of Economics and Statistics, Oxford

Rejected accusation that individual government statisticians were 'fiddling the figures'.

Argued instead that the spotlight should be turned on to the political processes which influence decisions about which statistics are to be collected about published, how this is done and which statistics are left out.

All welcome to come and contribute to the discussion

# **Social Science Forum initiative, 1991-92**

Meetings convened by Paul Allin, Secretary of Statistics Users Council, brought together groups concerned with improving official statistics:

Royal Statistical Society

Radical Statistics

Social Science Forum

Statistics Users Council

Market Research Society

RIPA

Led to establishment of Education Statistics Users Group and then Health Statistics Users Group (HSUG).

# Objectives of HSUG

1. To foster **appropriate use of statistics** to improve public health and effectiveness, quality and availability of healthcare in the UK.
2. To **encourage effective and useful collaboration** between the Government Statistical Service and other producers and users of statistics in the health and health services field.
3. To encourage the maintenance and **improvement** in timeliness, accuracy, utility, relevance, accessibility and completeness of this health information.
4. To develop **public confidence** in the production and use of health statistics.
5. To encourage good **statistical practice** by efficient and appropriate utilisation of health statistics.
6. To **educate** and train users of health statistics

# What is included in 'national health statistics' – our view

National health statistics:

Any statistical information relevant to national health

Not the current definition of national statistics

In the 'paper age' information tended to be organised:

by the organisation collecting it

by the organisation analysing it

In the 'electronic age' users want to be able to access the information they need, regardless of who collected it, or who analysed it

Now looking at information relating to health and social care, not just health care

# How is HSUG run?

The Group is run by a Committee, with the members of the Committee, in most cases, representing a particular group of health statistics providers or users, including:

Office for National Statistics

Local, regional and national NHS organisations

Local authorities

Researchers

## **Our activities are aimed at:**

Maintaining and improving data quality, data access, and use of health and health services statistics

Through encouraging effective collaboration between producers and users of health and social care statistics

# HSUG original activities

## Meetings

Dissemination: To provide information on recent developments

Consultations: Meetings to stimulate debate and obtain feedback

## Responses to consultations

Represent the views of health statistics users in any national discussions or consultations which are of relevance to health and health services statistics

## Funded by membership fee

## Newsletter

Printed and posted to members

# HSUG activities – what has changed?

**Meetings** - still important for:

- Dissemination

- Consultation, but:

  - More focus on ongoing user engagement

  - Interactive user workshops

  - Many more consultations on which to comment

  - Increase in meetings held outside London

- Professional development meetings

**Meetings supplemented by:**

- E-mail and web based dissemination, no printed newsletter

- E-mail and web based discussions

- Facilitating responses to individual user queries

**Membership free**

# Health Statistics User Group

## Examples of recent and current activities

Response to cuts in ONS statistics

Problems in accessing NHS data for England

Public health analysts transferred to local authorities

Access to data for research purposes

# Cuts in ONS health statistics

Current government promised to cut statistics and has kept its promises

Successive cuts rather than one big cut as in 1981

ONS had to make cut of £9million, of which £1million was cuts in statistics, mainly health statistics, including latest of long series of analyses of health inequalities

HSUG committee met with ONS statisticians to discuss which cuts were least damaging

Encouraged members and other organisations to respond

Response endorsed by Faculty of Public Health

# Access to NHS data by public health analysts

Health and Social Care Act moved public health analysts into local authorities

This meant they are no longer NHS staff and can no longer access the data they need

HSUG Committee met with Public Health England Transition team to try to alleviate the problems

Provided speakers for RSS meeting on the subject

Held well attended meeting of members with breakout groups to discuss and document problems

# Access to NHS data by researchers

Mishandling of the establishment of care.data by NHS England prompted press reports of misuse of data, mainly by private companies

Health and Social Care Information Centre responded with a moratorium on all data releases.

By the time the moratorium was lifted, a major backlog had developed and many research projects using NHS data were held up for at least a year

HSUG liaised with HSCIC staff about procedures for data release.

# Access to NHS data

## Taking the issues forward

HSUG wrote a paper on data access

Discussed at Statistics Users Forum meeting in July 2014

Agreed that, although paper specifically related to Health and Social Care data, it highlighted issues of more general interest.

Slightly revised version discussed at Statistics Suppliers and Users Group in September and, in turn, informed the development of the Administrative Data Service

# Other recent activities

Beyond 2011 – part of wider consultation on the future of the Census

Series of workshops on uses of health information

Response to the DH Consultation on Regulation of PH Specialists

# Contacting the Health Statistics User Group

Health statistics user group community on RSS

StatsUserNet site:

[www.hsug.org.uk](http://www.hsug.org.uk)

Jiscmail list [hsug@jiscmail.ac.uk](mailto:hsug@jiscmail.ac.uk)