

ASN Advisory Committee on Ensuring Trust in Nutrition Science
CALL NOTES
Monday, April 10, 2017

Bert Garza, Chair
Sylvia Rowe
Eric Campbell
Patrick Stover
Martha Field
Cathie Woteki
Ed Cooney
Judith Alonzo
Sarah Ohlhorst, staff

Chair Bert Garza welcomed the committee. There were no additions or changes to the agenda.

Committee Review of DRAFT Report Section

Section II. Landscape Analysis of Public Mistrust in Science and Nutrition

Committee members felt that this section is on the right track.

It was suggested that a paragraph be included to lay the groundwork for subsequent sections in the report, e.g., likely best practice recommendations. Committee members noted that the report should include examples in its highlighting of public benefit, scientific rigor, etc. of unique challenges that face human nutrition research, which are separate and distinct from the challenges shared with other life sciences, for which there are other remedies already in place and available to ASN. A discussion followed on the prudence/appropriateness of recommendations based on little to no very strong evidence of the type usually associated with randomized controlled trials (RCTs). RCTs have been the gold standard for health research, but requiring RCTs has not been nor likely will always be feasible moving forward. In medicine policy recommendations intended to protect the public often are made in the absence of “very strong evidence”. Rather, groups of experts are commissioned by authoritative bodies to consider available data in totality and to develop a consensus. This requires much more transparency and stronger efforts to estimate attendant uncertainties than has been common in past efforts.

Committee members also suggested that it is important to include additional information on the impact of values and culture in the context of trust within food and nutrition. Rather than personal values, values refers to what the majority of the public values and how issues related to widely held values play out in public. Concerns regarding animal welfare and its impact on trust of nutrition research and dietary recommendations is an example. The National Academies of Sciences report, *Communicating Science Effectively: A Research Agenda*, is a good resource for this. Culture refers to cultural eating patterns/ preferences. While the previous literature search wasn't devoid of this type of data, search strategies didn't look at this specifically. It doesn't warrant a deep dive now, but we should acknowledge that work related to those topics has been published and that these areas play potentially significant roles in impacting trust.

Scientific literacy doesn't always engender trust. Data show that the more you know (even if you don't understand the science), often the less trust you have. It is an inverse relationship, often contrary to what people believe. There is a movement in education related to this and a paragraph devoted to this in a subsequent section of the draft.

The highest levels of trust often are directed to academic scientists, but not industry. This may be a reflection of the institutions in which those scientists work and the public's perceptions of the impacts of potential conflicts of interest. Caution was recommended in dealing with these issues in drafting the report. Of special note is that professional conflicts of interest, as are financial conflicts, can bias research outcomes, e.g. research integrity violations most often occur among scientists in academic institutions, rather than in industry contrary to what some may believe.

During the review of specific parts of Section II, committee members suggested replacing use of the word "losers" with "harms". Transparency, objectivity and equity will not be lumped together. Objectivity will be incorporated into text that focuses on conflict of interest, and equity (in research in terms of who benefits) will become its own section. It was noted that some of this discussion centers on how public benefit is defined. There is public benefit from food/nutrition industry participation in research – the safety of food ingredients, etc. It was also suggested that following the final paragraph in section II which relates to GMO food, that a sentence with the following "sentiment" be included: The general paucity of data that relates to public trust in the food and nutrition arena was recognized by the committee. One exception to that finding is the area of GMO foods, a single, highly polarized topic. We recognize that the data related to this topic are not representative of the public's opinion of the field of nutrition overall.

Committee members suggested that a recommendation be included in the report that ASN sponsor a membership survey to establish a baseline on trust in science and conduct the survey on a periodic basis moving forward to gauge perceptions of trust in nutrition science. Bert Garza mentioned that the Chicago Council on Global Affairs is planning to conduct a survey on food and agriculture and trust issues. We could perhaps discuss our interests with them to help insure complementarity.

Next Steps

Additional sections of the draft report (III and IV) will be sent to Committee members in May, for review prior to the next ASN Advisory Committee call on **Tuesday, May 30th at 9:00am Eastern**. We will focus on best practices during the June call (Wednesday, June 14 at 1:00pm Eastern), and will likely need an additional 1-2 calls devoted to the best practices section of the report. We anticipate a final report in September/October.

Sarah Ohlhorst will set call dates for July and August in the near future.

The call adjourned at 11:01 AM.