



## EDITOR'S CHOICE

# Public health or research—money matters

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The BMJ

The UK introduced its first sugar tax this week. Soft drink manufacturers will now have to pay tax linked to a product's sugar content, and some companies are already taking action.<sup>1</sup> Whether it will have any impact on the obesity crisis remains to be seen,<sup>2</sup> but growing evidence shows that taxes on alcohol, tobacco, and soft drinks have been effective in reducing non-communicable diseases, as found in a new *Lancet* taskforce report (doi:10.1136/bmj.k1524).

These findings are consistent with research by the Global Tobacco Economics Consortium, which modelled the consequences of a 50% price increase on cigarettes among 500 million male smokers in 13 middle income countries. An increase in cigarette taxation would most benefit the poorest segment of a population, not only in life years saved but also by avoiding catastrophic health expenditure, the study finds (doi:10.1136/bmj.k1162). McCord and Novotny describe the additional economic benefits of higher cigarette taxation at a societal level (doi:10.1136/bmj.k1433).

But tackling financial motives is not sufficient. In our head to head debate, Miriam Wiersma and colleagues argue that we all have non-financial motives that must be managed, since they exert a “powerful influence on human behaviour” (doi:10.1136/bmj.k1240). Marc Rodwin, however, disagrees: financial

conflicts of interest are a practical legal tool, he says, and redefining them to include intellectual conflicts would reduce their usefulness, “making it merely another phrase for bias.”

Tim Schwab also tackles non-financial competing interests when considering Coca-Cola's influence on obesity research and whether nutrition researchers should declare their dietary preferences (doi:10.1136/bmj.k1451).

The NHS, the world's most prominent example of universal health coverage, will have its 70th anniversary in July. It is loved, valued, and unaffordable.<sup>3</sup> In their editorial, Appleby and Abbasi pose a series of questions about the uncertain affordability and sustainability of the NHS (doi:10.1136/bmj.k1540), and we will attempt to answer these in *The BMJ* over the course of this year.

On a brighter note, we seek your nominations for the NHS's greatest achievement. We will announce the results at the time of the 70th anniversary (doi:10.1136/bmj.k1562).

- 1 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/apr/08/sugar-drinks-tax-only-partly-effective-institute-fiscal-studies>.
- 2 <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.h4047>.
- 3 <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/95/7/16-187476/en/>.

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