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<th>Title</th>
<th>Charcoal burning is also popular for suicide pacts made on the internet [4]</th>
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The experience of the Health Council of the Netherlands in dealing with scientific elements (colliding knowledge claims, etc.), can be inspiring to develop methods and procedures to allow societal elements into the advisory process. Transparency about one's arguments, allowing your readership to join you in (or dissent from) a line of reasoning, is one of these fragile new procedures that enables the council to be both scientific and useful to policy and public debate.

Scientific journals should publish dissenting voices, as this is important for the advancement of science (although journals also have their backstage processes, as McCabe says in her rapid response). Science advisory boards, however, are to advise government on the state of the art. Debates in the committee further that goal, as this is useful in mobilising the expertise of committee members. Confidentiality of the committee process is essential for the production of such debates (public scrutiny during the process might deter openness among experts). Whereas it goes without saying that lasting dissent is not to be concealed, it seems unswise to bring temporary dissent into the open, as this would be easily taken up to politicise the advice and thus render it ineffective.

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Competing interests: None declared.

1 Abbi K. Editor's choice. Why nakedness is bad. BMJ 2004;329:1359-1361. (4 December.)

Charcoal burning is also popular for suicide pacts made on the internet

Editor—Rajagopal's editorial discussed how strangers can initiate suicide pacts on the internet. The two cited Japanese suicide pacts both used a new suicide method, charcoal burning. These widely publicised pacts were followed by four additional pacts and 13 deaths in two months, all of whom used charcoal burning. The new suicide method entails smouldering barbecue coal in a small and sealed environment, such as a bedroom, with the aim of producing a carbon monoxide chamber in a short time.2

In Hong Kong we had also observed that suicide pacts commonly used charcoal burning to institute death. In 2002 and 2003, 20 of the 22 suicide pacts (91%) used charcoal burning. Of all charcoal burning deaths during the same period, 7% were suicide pacts (unpublished review of coroners' case records for 2002-3, Coroner Court, Hong Kong SAR).

Several characteristics of charcoal burning make it desirable for people who want to commit suicide together. Unlike other methods of suicide, such as jumping and hanging, it can easily be shared. Besides, charcoal burning is often portrayed as non-disfiguring and painless. Hence, passive partners in suicide pacts could be more easily lured into the act.

The internet, apart from connecting otherwise isolated anomalies in forming suicide pacts in Japan, has played an important part in spreading the new suicide method across societies. Charcoal burning and cyber suicide pacts are examples of how globalisation and new technology are creating new challenges for global health.

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Competing interests: None declared.

1 Rajagopal S. Suicide pacts and the internet. BMJ 2004;329:1359-1361. (4 December.)
3 Chan KPM, Lee DTS, Lee S. Yip PSF. Media's role is double edged. BMJ 2003;326:693.

Submission to multiple journals to reduce publication times

Idea needs further evaluation

Editor—Torgerson et al moot the idea of submission to multiple journals to reduce publication times, but their article raises more questions than it provides answers.

Firstly, how many journals would authors be allowed to submit their article, and who will decide the number of simultaneous submissions—the authors or the journal?

Secondly, in the event of simultaneous acceptance by many journals, who would keep the article that the accepted article should remain with which journal—the authors (who always want their article published in the best journal) or the journals themselves (which might fight for the article if it is really high quality)?

Thirdly, what would happen to low rated journals (which may not be getting the article in first place)?

Fourthly, if the article were rejected by all the journals to which it was submitted, should the authors be allowed to resubmit it