Charcoal burning is also popular for suicide pacts made on the internet [4]
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 enable 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). Scientific 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 unwise 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;329:1539-1541. (4 December.)


Competing interests: None declared.

Authors advocate getting dressed for public performance, not nakedness is bad

Editor—Rather than arguing that nakedness is bad Abbai,1 in our article on the democratization of science we urge transparency advocates to be specific about the body parts that should be displayed publicly.2 As scientific advisory councils find themselves at the intersections of science and society, they necessarily transgress the boundaries of science. This makes them vulnerable to the politicisation of their work. Sound scientific advice is urgently needed in no time where our societies are overwhelmed with new technologies. Therefore, we think that science advisory boards do well in taking utmost care in shaping their relations with policy actors and the citizenry.

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Competing interests: None declared.

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3 Chan RPM, Lee DTS, Lee S. Yip PSF. Media’s role is double edged. BMJ 2003;326:659.

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.1 Firstly, to 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 Kumm R W, Hendriks R. Democratization of scientific advice. BMJ 2004;329:1539-1541. (4 December.)

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