

## EDITORIAL

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In a peer reviewed journal, it is important to tell our readers when a particular article is not subjected to peer review in the normal sense. That is the case with the piece in this issue by Simon Wessley and co-workers at Kings College London. Here is the story.

On 7 August 2005, we read an op-ed piece in the *New York Times*, “A Hero in Every Aisle Seat” by Professor Baruch Fischhoff of Carnegie Mellon University. We wrote to him as follows: “Dear Professor Fischhoff: I read your piece in the NYTimes with great interest (and pleasure). I [Anthony Robbins] have written in the past about the dangers of “reassurance” in public health, but have not seen the issue of “panic” dealt with so clearly. As the Co-Editor of the *Journal of Public Health Policy*, a global public health quarterly, I would like to invite you to write for us an article of 2500–4000 words that would describe for public health readers how they should understand in advance the way populations will react to frightening challenges, from epidemics to terrorism.

Professor Fischhoff replied, “Thanks for the kind remarks about my article. I’ve been thinking about your generous invitation to contribute to the journal, which has created a very nice niche. My conclusion is that I am not the right person. My own expertise is in risk analysis and communication. There are better people to write this article. I would suggest, in particular, Kathleen Tierney at the University of Colorado or Simon Wessely at Kings College London. Both are good friends. Kathleen is a sociologist, Si a psychiatrist.”

We replied “Thank you for your thoughtful response. As you may have guessed, my experience from 35 years in public health has taught me not to expect panic in the population. Your article resonated to that impression. Moreover, it seems important to tell my public health colleagues what to expect, particularly at a time when I find the US Government intent on scaring people about panic responses. I will probably query your friends and colleagues about their interest in the topic.”

We wrote to Professors Wessely and Tierney, and we are very pleased that the former took us up on the offer to write for the *Journal*. When we received the manuscript, we consulted four colleagues for informal advice, telling them the paper had been solicited and asking only whether there were important errors or any suggestions they would make to improve it. We passed on a few suggestions to the authors.

The article and an accompanying commentary by Jeanne Guillemin appear in this issue.