

How can road safety be improved? The *BMJ* asked four experts for their views

More people die on the roads than from malaria, says WHO chief

Etienne Krug is director of the department of injuries and violence prevention at the World Health Organization

Who should be primarily responsible for road safety on a national and international level?

This is an important question. At present road safety is seen as everybody's responsibility and therefore nobody is being held accountable. Clearly, for a problem that globally causes about 1.2 million deaths and injures 10-15 million people a year, responsibilities should be assigned.

Road safety is everybody's responsibility—the road users, governments, donor organisations, academia, and non-governmental organisations. However, what is needed is a commission or agency in each country that will coordinate a multidisciplinary agenda, with clear roles for all, and ensure that this agenda is developed, implemented, and monitored. This

commission or agency should have the mandate and resources to carry out this task.

What are the main obstacles to promoting a scientific approach to road safety?

There are many obstacles. Two of the main ones are ignorance and the lack of responsibility. There is ignorance about the size of the problem. Few people realise that more people die on the roads than from malaria, and many people do not know that road traffic injuries are preventable. If policy makers fully grasped how much could be gained by implementing policies on speed, drink driving, motor-cycle helmets, and visibility and acted accordingly, many lives could be saved.

On responsibility, as long as it is unclear who is ultimately

responsible and accountable for road safety, at national and international levels, it will be difficult to make progress. These two obstacles mean a lack of political commitment and funding for evidence based measures to prevent road traffic casualties.

What do you think is the most important thing to do to improve road safety worldwide?

The two obstacles mentioned above—ignorance and responsibility—must be addressed. What is needed is a strategy. The WHO's five year strategy for road traffic injury prevention was developed with that in mind (www5.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/main.cfm?s=0006).

This strategy, developed by a large group of experts and aimed at the public health community, focuses on strengthening collection of data, research, prevention, and advocacy. The strategy has much potential to build links between the health, transport, political, and other sectors involved in road safety.

Last month the Fédération Internationale d'Automobile

committed financial support to the implementation of this strategy. The WHO is making efforts to build bridges with other important partners—such as the World Bank, the Global Forum for Health Research, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and a number of academic institutions—to strengthen collaboration and strategic planning. □



Poor quality data are major obstacle to improving road safety, says World Bank

Richard Scurfield is the leader of the transport sector of the World Bank's Transport and Urban Development Department

Who should be primarily responsible for road safety on a national and international level?

At the national level it is essential that there is a very high level of government commitment to tackling road safety, with strong support from all relevant agencies. These are generally numerous—hence in most countries it is necessary to establish a national road safety council to coordinate activities. All relevant agencies should be represented on the council—the road authorities, traffic police, education and health ministries, local governments, interested private companies and institutions, and groups representing citizens. At the

international level we would like to see even closer collaboration among interested agencies, groups, and institutions, including the WHO and ourselves, with the active support of citizens' groups and the private sector.

Public transport is safer and more sustainable than private car travel, but the car predominates—how can we change this?

Good quality public transport services must be encouraged. It is almost always necessary to take active steps to dissuade people from using their cars. While this is difficult to achieve in practice, a good start can be made by introducing appropriate fuel taxes, parking charges and traffic management measures that give

priority to public transport vehicles.

Because in most developing countries public transport is provided by the private sector, governments must create a supportive regulatory environment that promotes the provision of safe and attractive public transport services. Regrettably, in some countries the safety and security of public transport is itself a problem and a major deterrent to its use.

What are the main obstacles to promoting a scientific approach to road safety?

One of the major obstacles is the poor quality of data in many countries. The more we know about the causes of road accidents, the better able we will be to design and implement appropriate solutions. Reliable statistics are essential for effective research and the development of well founded national road safety strategies.

What do you think is the most important thing to do to improve road safety worldwide? There needs to be a major worldwide effort to raise the



awareness of the importance of road safety as a public health issue. This is increasingly recognised internationally, and examples are recent announcements of the WHO and the creation several years ago of the Global Road Safety Partnership—a voluntary association of business, civil, and governmental bodies, established with the support of the World Bank. At the national level, however, very few of our client countries have fully recognised the seriousness of the issue. □