

**George Morris, Scientific Policy Adviser, Scottish Executive Health Department
"A Strategic Approach to Manipulating Environment for Public Health"**

Various factors have reduced the perceived role of the physical environment in human health. Abandonment of an ecological perspective and a tendency to view health and disease as characteristics of individuals rather than populations has each been influential. Rhetoric has emphasised the importance of health to life circumstances to health but health care continues to have first call upon the physical and intellectual resources. Simultaneously, preventative emphasis has remained firmly targeted on aspects of individual behaviour.

A conceptual model representing the relationship between physical environment and health is the key to developing a more strategic approach to environmental health. This ought to be assessed in terms of capacity, when populated by the evidence, to make the implications for policy and action more apparent. Thus, it must show how physical environment relates to health recognising psychological effects in addition to the more toxic, infectious and allergenic impacts. Neither can it ignore the important contribution of social, behavioural, demographic etc. influences.

A review of contemporary health policy drivers in the UK reveals many to be expressed in terms of health improvement and notably health inequalities. Despite obvious relevance to these areas and notably inequalities environmental manipulation remains rooted within the health protection agenda.

It must be recognised however, that effective policy and action is about much more than arranging evidence within an appropriate conceptual framework. The application of a conceptual model can go beyond issues of evidence to serve as a framework within which to review the existing and proposed policy map and in policy evaluation. Critically, it can be used more generally for gap analysis embracing such issues as knowledge and capacity within the workforce, environmental and other standards and research priorities.

George Morris is seconded from Health Protection Scotland as Scientific Policy Adviser within the CMO's Group in the Scottish Executive Health Department. In this role he provides advice on a range of environment and health issues and leads on development of a strategic approach to environment and health in Scotland. Beginning his career in local government, George subsequently held academic posts in the Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde and is currently a Visiting Professor at the latter. He maintains affiliations with these institutions and with the University of Edinburgh. Awarded fellowship of the Faculty of Public Health Medicine in 2001, he is currently an assessor for the recently created Voluntary Register of Public Health Specialists. He has an enduring interest in the role of physical environment as a determinant of health and in the principles underpinning the discipline of environmental health.