

## Health Care through the Lens of Risk

### Call for Papers for a four part special issue of Health, Risk & Society

Guest editors: Bob Heyman, Andy Alaszewski and Patrick Brown

Despite a major expansion in the social science of risk over the last two decades, the status and meaning of the term remain unclear. Rosa (2003) diagnosed ‘an intentional silence about defining risk at all’ in much of this literature, while Luhmann (1993) referred to ‘carelessness in concept formation’. Writers in the field habitually refer to risk in ways which imply **both** that risks can exist independently of perceptions, **and** that risk propositions reference an observer’s interpretive framework.

This four-part Special Issue will provide authors with an opportunity to analyse risk thinking itself, drawing on original research and/or critical reviews relevant to health and health care. The starting point for this call is the Royal Society (1992) definition of risk as:

the probability **(3)** that a particular adverse **(2)** event **(1)** occurs during a stated time period **(4a)**, or results from a particular challenge **(4b)** (present authors’ additions in brackets).

Each of the four numbered elements of risk thinking can be reframed so as to emphasise its interpretive status (Heyman, Shaw, Alaszewski and Titterton, 2010, p. 21). Each part of the special issue will focus primarily on one of the following four issues:

- (1) The **categorisation** of health risks and the differentiation of cases from non-cases, (e.g. the distinction between depression and sadness)
- (2) **Value** judgements about the adversity of the outcome which a health risk refers to, and about multiple consequences (e.g. teenage pregnancy as an adverse outcome)
- (3) **Expectations** about risked outcomes (e.g. understandings of probabilities in relation to the limitations of probabilistic reasoning)
- (4) The **time-framing** of health risks (e.g. the consequences of focussing on five year survival in randomised controlled trials of cancer drugs).

The four-part Special Issue will be published in 2012, possibly over more than one edition. It is envisaged that the Special Issue will include interviews with authors of the original Royal Society report about its historical significance. Ideally, papers, either original research or critical reviews, via the journal website should be submitted by **31 June 2011**, but short extensions may be possible. Potential authors are invited to discuss proposals informally with the guest editors by emailing:

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## REFERENCES

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- Luhmann, N., 1993. *Risk: A sociological theory*. Berlin: Aldine Transaction.
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