

Note on the apparent bias of MRC “CFS/ME” Research Advisory Group in their draft document for public consultation dated 17th December 2002

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2nd January 2003

Elementary Rules of Procedure

1. There are in existence elementary rules of procedure of which the authors of the MRC “CFS/ME” Research Advisory Group draft document for public consultation re strategy for future research into “CFS/ME” seem to be ignorant. An alternative explanation is that the authors of the document hope that those who read it will be ignorant of the elementary rules of procedure, so it will not be noticed if those rules are flouted in issues pertaining to “CFS/ME”.

In this case, the MRC RAG consists of eminent independent experts of professorial status, so they would be expected to know that postgraduate students who undertake a higher degree by research are normally requested before proceeding to define the proposed topic and to produce a comprehensive review of the relevant literature.

Only by so doing can they place themselves in a position to ensure that their own prospective contribution represents a potentially useful and original development of knowledge.

2. What clearly seems to be missing from the MRC document is the prerequisite review of what has already been established about the disorder(s).
3. By neglecting this required first step, the authors of the MRC document which addresses proposed strategies for the direction of future research into the disorder(s) ensure that any “contribution” arising from their efforts will not be situated squarely on the foundations of existing knowledge, thereby creating the likelihood that their “contribution” will be at cross-purposes to the existing body of knowledge.

4. The pre-existing body of literature which the authors of the MRC research strategy proposal appear to have overlooked, or deliberately ignored, is extensive.
5. By proposing to proceed as if this substantive body of mainstream knowledge did not exist, the authors of the MRC document lay themselves open to suspicions of ignorance and / or disingenuousness, or even frank intellectual dishonesty.
6. Investigators are, of course, always at liberty to take issue with established knowledge, but if they wish to do so legitimately and credibly, they need to formulate a carefully reasoned critique of each tenet of established knowledge from which they propose to depart.
7. If the current MRC proposal were to be submitted by an intending postgraduate student, any conscientious academic supervisor would be obliged to reject it on the grounds that, in consequence of the inadequate and perfunctory literature review (conceded by the MRC Group themselves), the proposed research strategy would not be expected to move understanding or knowledge along, but only to re-inforce existing confusion.
8. It is both disappointing and baffling that the MRC has allowed this poorly-grounded, haphazard and potentially biased strategy proposal to be entertained.

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