

Response from the [REDACTED] Lay Committee Consultation on EU Guidelines for Lay Summaries

The bullet points in Sections 4 and 5 may not seem like rocket science, and those who are sceptical about the huge cost of research into the obvious would most certainly object to EU funds being expended in this way. It's an incontrovertible fact, however, that most professionals, indeed in every sector, are unable to assess the comprehension levels of their clients.

Healthcare professionals, in particular, have been notorious for barely trying to judge if what they aim to communicate, whether oral or written, is likely to be understood. They often fail to realise, despite attending courses in communication skills that, unless they assume the recipient of any medical explanation is at level 0 in knowledge and understanding, communication will not take place. Further, they are unlikely to realise that once the initial opportunity to communicate has been lost, it's almost impossible to regain without causing additional confusion.

The main problem with the EU guidelines is that there are too many bullet points – including one which suggests using bullet points. Many of them either go into an excess of detail or not enough. The advice in the bullet point which suggests using an active voice rather than a passive one as a general rule is debatable for a start, and is therefore, perhaps, one too many. The positive aspect of that particular bullet point, however, is that it offers an illustration of what is meant, which most of the other bullet points do not, and giving an example is always a useful tool in communication.

Section 11 refers to an expert group that comprised of representatives from industry, patient organisations and academia. It would have been interesting to know the make-up of the group so that it would be possible to see how representative it was of NHS lay opinion.

Nonetheless, the document seems sensible and the use of examples is positive and should be developed. The comments on assessing readability, numeracy and presentation style are very relevant for all such documents.