

Article published in The Telegraph 23/05/2017

Fear is a fat lot of help

SIR - An attempt to tackle obesity (report, May 20) by frightening parents with holograms of overweight children will fail.

Unsuccessful anti-smoking campaigns have shown that terrorising people is ineffective. The number of smokers fell only when television tobacco advertising was banned, a fact known to Public Health England, the organisation responsible for improving the nation's health.

It is a paradox that, although Public Health England correctly identifies the deleterious effects on children's health from prolonged exposure to television viewing (chiefly responsible for the childhood obesity epidemic), it is doing precious little about it. Instead of endorsing "shock tactics" and offering pointless advice (everybody knows you lose weight if you eat less); Public Health England should focus on the main culprit, television viewing, and offer an effective antidote - reading.

Science shows that reading improves sleep patterns and reduces depression. The importance of reading to children and teaching them to read cannot be over-emphasised. It boosts their learning potential, strengthens relationships, increases concentration and, above all, takes children away from omnipresent screens.

Dr Kosta Manis
Sidcup, Kent