

Oliver Gillie - Brief biography and publications on vitamin D

Oliver Gillie is a scientist and writer. He is former medical correspondent of The Sunday Times and former health editor of The Independent. He has won 17 awards for his scientific and medical writing in national newspapers. He is involved in planning several clinical trials of vitamin D and has campaigned over several years to inform the public, politicians and doctors of the importance of vitamin D for health. He was elected health champion of the year by the Medical Journalists' Association for his campaign to inform the public and professionals about vitamin D insufficiency disease.

His work over the last eight years has been to pass on information about vitamin D insufficiency to scientists, doctors, and journalists and to lobby government and organisations such as Cancer Research UK for a rational evidence-based public health policy on sunlight and vitamin D. Advice from CR UK and government to avoid the sun have almost certainly increased risks of vitamin D insufficiency and associated illness which probably includes cancer, cardiovascular disease, multiple sclerosis, diabetes and much more. Advice on sun exposure and use of vitamin D supplements in the UK is still woefully inadequate.

Oliver Gillie is collaborating with Professor Julian Peto of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in the development of scientific trials of vitamin D. All his work on vitamin D has been done on a pro bono basis without any personal remuneration from commercial interests such as supplement sales or sunlamp manufacturers. In 2012 he launched The Vitamin D Company Ltd to provide the vitamin in a convenient dosage form not readily available in the UK. He is an associate editor of the Journal of Public Health Nutrition, is former vice-chair of the Caroline Walker Trust, the nutrition charity which has campaigned for healthy school food, and former chairman of the Medical Journalists' Association.

Oliver Gillie has written 13 books on science, health and lifestyle and made two television documentaries. While medical editor of The Independent he started the Health Page, which was an immediate success and was copied by all the other national quality dailies. He is a graduate of Edinburgh University and a former Fulbright scholar at Stanford University.

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Publications by Oliver Gillie on vitamin D and sunlight:

Sunlight Robbery- Health benefits of sunlight are denied by current public health policy in the UK. (2004), drew attention to the health benefits of sunbathing and vitamin D and inadequate public understanding of the issues. Alternative advice for the public on safe sun exposure, called the SunSafe advice, was given in the book. This advice differs in important ways from the advice of Cancer Research-UK, which encourages sun avoidance so risking serious vitamin D insufficiency and increasing overall risks of cancer. The SunSafe advice, which is based on both scientific evidence and commonsense, encourages safe sun exposure so that the skin can make vitamin D while at the same time minimising the risk of skin cancer.

Sir Richard Doll commented on the book: "I am most impressed with the way Gillie has collected and presented the evidence".

Scotland's health deficit: an explanation and a plan (2008), has drawn attention to vitamin D insufficiency in Scotland and the link with chronic disease. The central hypothesis of the book is that a substantial and significant portion of the excess mortality of Scotland compared with England is caused by vitamin D insufficiency. This excess mortality, known as "the Scottish effect", cannot be explained by smoking, alcohol, diet or poverty. A subsidiary hypothesis is that major chronic diseases that are caused at least in part by D insufficiency (e.g. cancer, heart disease, MS etc) will have a higher incidence in Scotland than in England. Evidence for these ideas is examined in the book and general support is found for them.

Sir Muir Gray commented: "I was very impressed by the strength of evidence and by the conclusion... The work is of importance and a great achievement."

These books are available free from: www.healthresearchforum.org.uk

Academic articles:

A new government policy is needed for sunlight and vitamin D. *Brit J Dermatol* 2005;**154**:1052-61

Sunlight Robbery: a critique of public health policy on vitamin D in the UK. *Molecular Nutrition and Food Research*, 2010;**54**(1-16).

The Scots' Paradox: Can Sun Exposure, or Lack of it, Explain Major Paradoxes in Epidemiology? *Anticancer Research* 32: 237-248 (2012)

Lecture:

Sunlight Robbery: Vitamin D and public health – Is current public health policy on vitamin D for purpose? Annual Caroline Walker Trust lecture, Kensington Town Hall, November 2010. Available free from: www.healthresearchforum.org.uk

Journalism:

The Sunday Times, The Independent, The Guardian, The Times, The Sunday Telegraph and various magazines.