

## RECENT DISSERTATIONS

### SVERRE PETTERSEN: 2007

Health Claims and Scientific Knowledge. A study of how students of health sciences, their teachers, and journalists relate to health claims in society

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#### Abstract

The general questions raised in the thesis are the following: To what extent are health sciences students skilled at performing critical and scientific evaluation of the huge “flow” of health claims in the media, and how do they relate to non-scientifically based health claims such as those about complementary-alternative medicine (CAM)? What do the health sciences teachers of the *Philosophy of science and research methods* (PSRM) and *Biological sciences* (BS) subjects teach that might contribute to their students’ obtainment of scientific evaluation skills, and how do these teachers relate to CAM themselves? What are newspaper health journalists’ perceptions about their own skills at reporting health news? In order to address these questions, four major questionnaire surveys were conducted in Norway using samples of nursing, physiotherapy, social educator, and radiography students (1<sup>st</sup> survey); the teachers from these four health sciences educations of the PSRM and BS subjects (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> survey); and health journalists (4<sup>th</sup> survey). In-depth interviews with two health journalists were also performed. The results are mainly discussed against the backdrop of theories associated with the research field of *science education*.

The main conclusions which can be drawn from the research are that the respondent health sciences students’ skills for critical and scientific evaluation of health claims are far from satisfactory. At the same time, many of the students and teachers hold positive attitudes towards CAM. These findings suggest that the teachers of the PSRM and BS subjects should emphasize teaching about critical thinking, epistemologies, the scientific standards of validity, and the traits of pseudoscience – all things which are fundamental for having knowledge of the “nature of science” (NOS), which is an essential ingredient of *scientific literacy*. Many of the respondent health journalists seemed to want to improve their scientific evaluation skills of health claims.

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