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Cultural change: 'Mate, what are you doing?'

UM restored ties with student association Tragos last week: there is sufficient confidence that the culture within the association has changed for the better. What is different now? President Max Beckers: "There is more social control. It is important that even a first-year member dares to say to a senior member: 'Mate, what are you doing?'"

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Traumatised for life

Between the ages of 0 and 16, healthy children in the Netherlands receive around 20 vaccinations. A child who ends up in hospital due to illness or accident may have to endure many more jabs and other medical procedures. This can have a profound impact on young patients; some are traumatised for life. This needs to change, says Piet Leroy, paediatrician and professor in Maastricht.

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Speak a bit slowly

"I speak a bit more slowly in this international context, for one thing. I consciously use high-frequency words. I do this in my column too", writes columnist Michael Erard. Why?

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Riki Janssen

editorial

Journalists have to ask the uncomfortable questions

Some time ago, I had an intern standing at my desk. He'd written an interview article, but his questions hadn't probed deeply enough. The interviewee mentioned that she struggled with certain things in her life, but the article didn't say why. I didn't ask, the intern said. Why not? Well, it might have been awkward. Maybe she didn't want to talk about it. He thought that asking the question might have created an uncomfortable situation, which he preferred to avoid. It was only in that moment, standing at my desk, that he realised he had broken an important rule: never assume what someone else is thinking or feeling. As a result, he had missed the opportunity to have a meaningful conversation (which is what an interview can be; it's much more than just reading off a list of questions).

My colleague WD recently introduced me to the book *Socrates on Sneakers* by Elke Wiss, "a philosophical guide to asking good questions". Wiss says, "We assume the other person will be embarrassed or find the topic uncomfortable or perhaps confronting to talk about. It makes us aware of our own vulnerability."

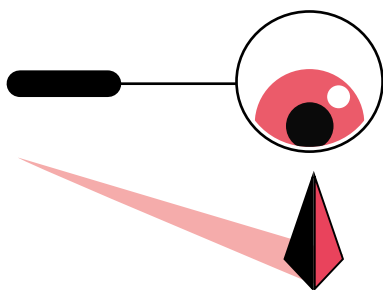
If you always want everyone to like you, or if you want to go through life without asking hard-hitting questions, journalism may not be the career for you. As a journalist, you often need to broach sensitive subjects, ask probing questions, play devil's advocate or confront an interviewee with uncomfortable truths or things they've said. That's all part of the job. Speaking from experience, I can confirm that this sometimes darkens the mood of the conversation.

But as long as your questions come from a place of genuine interest in relevant facts and opinions, you must accept these occasional moments of awkwardness.

Empathy, a concept extensively discussed by Wiss, is a tricky concept for a journalist. While being able to empathise with people is a good thing, it's best for journalists to maintain more emotional distance. This helps you ask the right – sometimes uncomfortable – questions, remain observant and truly listen to what someone is saying.

Every week, the editor-in-chief writes about what has been happening at the Observant office.

splinters



A funny incident, a striking piece of news, something interesting that happened elsewhere in the country: it is in this column. Contributions: Peter Doorackers, Simon Wirtz, Cleo Freriks

Bat saves student house – for now

There was agitation among the almost one hundred temporary inhabitants – mainly students – of a former municipal office in Leiden. They were recently given notice to vacate: they were told that they should be out by 1 October, because the building is to be demolished. Or is it? One of the inhabitants discovered that a bat has also made the building its home (that person heard the mating call at nighttime, after which he traced the animal using "professional equipment") and sounded the alarm, sister newspaper *Mare* reports. This 'common pipistrelle' is a protected species and hence an exemption is needed. Before that, research into the bat will have to be carried out from May to October – the guy who discovered the little animal remarked that it is "better protected than we are".

Due to the research, demolition of the building has been delayed, the city of Leiden informed. The bat has therefore given the occupants some respite, as they can now stay in the building six months longer – until April next year. It is not just the inhabitants and the bat who are reaping the rewards of this: "Financially it is also better for the municipality to leave us where we are. Everyone wins," said the bat discoverer.

Bachelor for the second time

"A romantic spectacle like you have never experienced before" – this is how the Dutch streaming service Videoland advertises the show *The Bachelor*, in which two single men are trying to find the woman for life under the Tanzanian sun since last week. In addition to influencer Rien Welsink, Paul Roos is also charming the women this year – a name that you might have heard a few times at the Law Faculty. Roos after all spent nearly 10 years there: as a student of Dutch Law from 2012 to 2017, and as a tutor until 2020.

Today, his sister Isabelle Roos still works as a lecturer in the Bouillonstraat. "It was strange at first to see Paul on a television show. But also great, exciting in a way," she says. But what is a lawyer looking for on a dating show? "Paul didn't know whether he really felt happy as a lawyer. And recently we got the news that our mother is terminally ill. That made him realise how short life can be. And then he wanted to do something different."

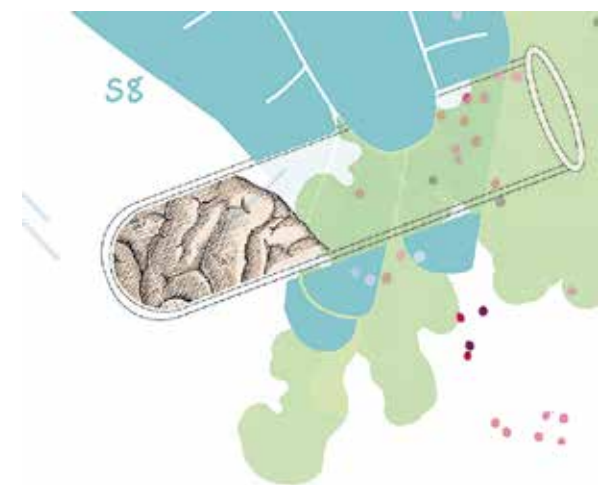
Her big brother is now back in Amsterdam – the recordings have been completed in the meantime – and "working like we all do," says Isabelle, no influencer career in sight. But she leaves out the most important thing: who is the winner of the show, the new Mrs. Roos? "I have no clue. I am excited to find out soon."

Living brain cells or online freedom

What do children want to know more about? How a chip can help to heal a brain that is sick? Or what you need to do to maintain your freedom on the Internet?

It is that time again: the annual Klokhuis Wetenschapsprijs, (Klokhuis Science Prize). The informative children's programme awards prizes to scientific research that is relevant and interesting for primary-school children. They also highlight the winning research in an episode of the programme. This year there are two nominations from Maastricht: neurobiologist Govert Hoogland and Assistant Professor of Cyber Security and Politics Mariëlle Wijermars. They are competing with eight researchers from other cities. Hoogland and his team are doing research into epilepsy, taking a small piece of brain, which is kept alive in the lab by means of a chip. They are looking into whether it is possible to cure brain tissue and replace it in someone's brain. They are also researching methods that make no use of animal testing. Wijermars is looking into how Internet freedom is viewed in different countries. What social media are you allowed to use, what kind of information are you allowed to look up and how free are you to give your opinion online? Also, are those rules drawn up for the protection of children or to limit the freedom of speech?

The winner will be announced on 17 March. Voting will take place until that day via the *Klokhuis* website.



Foundation to investigate alleged involvement in abuse in basketball team

Subsidy for professor Vreugdenhil's foundation temporarily suspended

The Elisabeth Strouven Fonds (ESF) has temporarily suspended a subsidy for the Your Coach Next Door (YCND) foundation from Maastricht professor and paediatrician Anita Vreugdenhil. The fund is "shocked" by reports in Trouw and De Limburger about abuse in basketball team Maastricht Rebels, in which Vreugdenhil and her foundation are allegedly involved. YCND itself is having an external investigation carried out.

The ESF, which financially supports social initiatives in Maastricht and surrounding areas, informed that their subsidy amounts to approximately 50,000 euro (of which 80 per cent has already been paid out). This subsidy is issued to fund a collaboration with the Maastricht Rebels, where basketball clinics are organised in the fight against obesity in chil-

dren. YCND applied for this last year. A larger subsidy of 850,000 euro (divided over several years) for organising other "exercise activities for children" are not subject to discussion at the moment, an ESF spokesperson said.

The fund is concerned whether money is being spent properly. There are many questions about the financial links between YCND and the basketball team belonging to the British Mike Rawson (also Vreugdenhil's partner), among them foreign players allegedly being underpaid and playing without work permits and insurance. *Trouw* writes that the players' contracts state that the basketball players receive a considerable amount (sometimes up to 1,800 euro) for being ambassadors for YCND, which includes giving clinics. Vreugdenhil herself states that her foundation does not "pay players or sponsor the Maastricht Rebels". How-

ever, she has so far refused to give access to the annual reports, in spite of requests from various media, including *Observant*. A request for clarification from ESF has also remained unanswered.

YCND's Board of Governors and supervisory board have now decided – in response to the accusations – to have an external party carry out an investigation, Vreugdenhil informed *Observant* by mail. "Pending that investigation, we are not making any further announcements." Earlier, the city of Maastricht had already announced that they will investigate the situation regarding the Maastricht Rebels. ESF says it will wait for those outcomes before deciding on continuation of the subsidy.

Dennis Vaendel

Kick-off of the festivities around thirtieth anniversary

Time capsule in FASoS garden: "Maybe the aliens will come across it at some stage"



On the left dean Christine Neuhold, on the right an employee with the time capsule Photo: Joey Roberts

A remarkable object adorns the garden behind the buildings of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS) on the Grote Gracht. It looks like an over-sized thermos flask, but it is a proper 'time capsule'. The text on the top ('FASoS 1994-2024') gives away the occasion: the faculty's thirtieth anniversary. Later on this year, there will be other activities, such as a student gala and a large personnel party, but last Thursday afternoon was the kick-off of the festivities.

Amid a few dozen people in a timid spring sun, the object disappeared into the ground, close to a tree planted for the occasion (and sponsored by Facility Services). The tree is a symbol of the motto *FASoS makes you grow*, said dean Christine Neuhold during a speech.

The contents of the time capsule should give future finders an idea of what the faculty did at the age of thirty. Items enclosed include brochures of all study programmes, the latest scientific annual report and the faculty's current strategic plan. Also, booklets containing stories about research and poems by FASoS researchers, to demonstrate the creativity of the present employees. Other items in the capsule (students and staff were invited to make submissions, from which the jubilee committee made a selection): a face mask from the Covid-19 days, a salary scale, a prediction of what FASoS education will look like in twenty years' time written by ChatGPT, and letters by students to their future selves.

Whether the writers will ever read their own letters again, is still unclear: exactly when the

capsule will be dug up, the jubilee committee has not decided yet. "I would love for this to happen in twenty years' time, for the fiftieth anniversary," said one committee member, "but my colleague wants the capsule to be forgotten about, so that a future civilization finds it by accident in a couple of hundred years from now." Laughing: "Or maybe even the aliens."

Forgetting the time capsule did not appear to be a great challenge. Even before the last shovel of soil was thrown over the object, the attention of most people present was already somewhere else: eagerly responding to the invitation "the bar is open".

Dennis Vaendel



Vocabulary lesson: accommodation

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As you know, I speak and write English natively. But I'd like to tell you how I use English differently in this international context, with lots of non-native users of English. I speak a bit more slowly, for one thing. I consciously use high-frequency words. And I don't do the sort of verbal play that I do with my family (where, for instance, you pick up an inadvertent rhyme and build on it).

I also try to remove idiomatic expressions from my speech and writing. However, the other day, I slipped. In an email, I wrote about "taking the temperature" of a group, and the recipient of my message didn't grasp the idiom immediately. I have to continue being careful.

I simplify the syntax of my sentences too. Once I wrote a sentence that was structured like, "Monday was a sunny day, Tuesday rainy." But this ellipsis – that's the name for this rhetorical pattern – confused the person, who was a highly-educated European Commission bureaucrat. "You are a native speaker of English, aren't you?" they asked me. As my sentence was perfectly grammatical, I was the one to be confused. Now I stay away from very low frequency sentence structures. (I do this in my column too.)

In the homelands of English, advice about writing usually dictates that you should use words with Anglo-Saxon roots. They're shorter, for one thing. Also punchier. But in this environment, the better choice is often words with Latin or Greek roots, even though they have more syllables. That's because they're cognate with more other European mother tongues, so the texts are more accessible.

These sorts of subtle shifts of language are overlooked in the discourse about building a bilingual Dutch-English environment at the university. This is a pity, because it makes invisible the linguistic accommodations that we already make – and which all of us will have to learn to do, and more often.

Being bilingual isn't just about your knowledge of two linguistic codes, it's also about your awareness of who you're addressing and what their abilities are likely to be. Will this change your Dutch? Of course. Will this change my English? Of course – it already has.

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Michael Erard,
Funding Advisor at the Faculty of Law

series the societal impact of UM research

Dreaming of a 'spot clinic': Scanning for skin cancer can speed up the diagnostic process



Photo: Ellen Oosterhof

In today's world, the societal impact of research findings seems more important than getting published in an academic journal like *Nature* or *The Lancet*. What impact has research conducted at UM had in recent years? This week: a device that can scan suspicious-looking spots for skin cancer and provide an immediate diagnosis.

If you find a suspicious spot on your skin, your doctor will likely refer you to a dermatologist. If the spot looks like it could be skin cancer, the dermatologist will do a biopsy: they will remove a small sample of tissue and send it to a pathologist to be checked for cancer cells. Several weeks later, you'll find out whether you have cancer or not. Dermatologist and researcher Professor Klara Mosterd thought there had to be a way to speed up this diagnostic process. With her team at MUMC+, she tested a device that can detect skin cancer on the spot.

Sun exposure

Skin cancer is on the rise, and not just among older people. "We're seeing more young patients with spots on their faces and chests, for example", says Mosterd. "Sun exposure is the primary cause." Thankfully, the majority of cases involve a relatively mild form of skin cancer known as basal cell carcinoma. "Basal cell carcinoma accounts for about 80 per cent of skin cancer cases. It's highly treatable; half the time, surgical intervention isn't necessary and a cream will do the job. More patients are opting for this treatment. While surgery can remove all the cancer and reduce the chance of

recurrence, a cream can be used to treat multiple spots at the same time. And it leaves no scars – that's important to patients, too."

Scanner

Several years ago, Mosterd came across an OCT scanner (optical coherence tomography) at a dermatology conference. She knew of its use by optometrists: "OCT is a great way to get a very detailed image of the eye. It has limited penetration depth, but that doesn't matter – the eye's retina, like the skin, is a superficial organ. MRI can provide more depth, but less detailed images." The scanner uses light waves to see up to 1.5 mm into the skin. Mosterd sketches a cross-section, explaining, "The top layer of the skin is the epidermis. With basal cell carcinoma, we typically see little round tumours extending from the epidermis, sometimes into the layer below: the dermis. It's when we see spiky dots that we begin to worry – those require surgical removal." But as depth increases, resolution decreases, explains Mosterd. Doesn't this mean that a biopsy, which goes deeper into the skin, would provide better results? "Not necessarily. A biopsy

doesn't show everything, either. With a biopsy, you use an instrument that looks like a tiny apple corer to remove a small sample of tissue. A scan shows the whole spot."

Spot clinic

To Mosterd's team, the scanner seemed to offer an efficient way to diagnose skin cancer on the spot. Its widespread adoption could save considerable time and resources. First, however, they had to verify its accuracy. "We can't have false or missed diagnoses." Research showed that a scan alone provided a conclusive diagnosis in 65 per cent of cases. The remaining 35 per cent of patients still needed a biopsy. "If we are not sure, we will still take a biopsy." So, the device proved effective. Its use in dermatology is already recommended by international guidelines, and it will soon be included in the Dutch guidelines for basal cell carcinoma, says Mosterd. Health insurance companies have also shown interest, recognising its cost-saving potential. While the scanner itself costs roughly 75,000 euros, it accelerates the diagnostic process and frees up worker time. "And it can be operated by either a doctor or a nurse." The research-

ers have already spoken with one health insurance company, VGZ, which has identified the method as a best practice. However, there are still some steps to take before it can be put into widespread use. "Only a handful of people in the country know how to operate the device, and they're all here. Maastricht is a leading centre for skin cancer treatment and research in the Netherlands." To train more people, an online training programme has been developed. Hospitals will also need to make room for the scanner, and departments are often pressed for space. "Setting up separate 'spot clinics' – outpatient clinics dedicated to skin cancer scanning – could be a solution." With the new method, patients will be spared a biopsy with a three-millimetre "apple corer". And rather than spending weeks waiting for a phone call from their dermatologist, they will receive their results almost immediately after the scan. If they turn out to have basal cell carcinoma, 50 per cent of cases can be treated with a cream. These patients will be able to leave the clinic with a prescription in hand.

Lotte van de Loo

Chairperson on 'cultural change' at Tragos student association

"If things go wrong again, the university will be done with us"

"A lot and loud rejoicing" is how Tragos chairperson Max Beckers describes the reaction of members last Friday. During a reception, no less, at the end of the foundation day celebration, he was able to announce the news that Maastricht University had restored its ties with the student association. Tragos can again claim board grants and participate in the INKOM introduction week. A relief, because "we have worked really hard on a cultural change. It is truly different now compared to how it was."

It was the buzzword within Tragos lately: cultural change. Only if UM was "really convinced" that this had been implemented, said the Executive Board, they would lift the sanctions that were introduced in September 2022 after misconduct (consisting, among other things, of "racist and sexist songs being sung") during the hazing. That moment was reached after eighteen months. "The university bided its time for quite a while, and I also understand that," said Beckers. "I think that if things go wrong again sometime soon, we will lose all credibility and the university will be done with us."

What have they done lately to convince UM? Beckers, sitting at the club's conference table on the Fort Willemweg, starts at the beginning: the eight members involved were temporarily suspended immediately after the incident and the association's sanction policies and code of conduct were toughened. "But the 'good' thing was that all members seemed to be ashamed of what had happened. How do you explain this kind of thing at home?"

So, the members themselves also wanted to see change. In the weeks after the misconduct, a 'progress committee' was set up, consisting of one male and one female member from each of the past four batches. The objective was to investigate what needed to change within Tragos.

Destroying the toilet

The committee's most important deed was to commission an external agency to carry out an investigation into the association's culture, including a questionnaire that was completed by "90 to 95 per cent of all active members" as well as group discussions in which "at least a hundred members participated". Tragos did not let *Observant* see the report from the investigation, because it contains "privacy-sensitive information". But, Beckers says, the results were "positive: the values of our members are in line with those of the university. The only thing was that they were not always expressed well enough at Tragos. The report clearly indicated how we could deal with this."

How? "There was a need for more transparency and trust

within the association. If everyone feels free to speak out, there will be more social control. In the past, a lot of things used to get broken through sheer rowdiness – the ceilings in the toilets were regularly destroyed. It is important that in such an instance even a first-year student dares to say to a senior student: 'Mate, what are you doing?' Or that a board member explains: 'With the money from those repairs we could have organised great activities'. That is happening now, and you see that hardly anything has been demolished."

It is not that there was no opportunity to speak out in the past, says Beckers. "But I understand that not everyone dares to do so at an AGM with three hundred people. We will now regularly sit down with fraternity and sorority boards and chairpersons from the year clubs, to discuss problems. You reach a lot more members that way and it makes them feel more involved in decisions."

Hazing

Hazing, or introduction period, was also given a complete makeover. "With help from the Koninklijke Militaire Academie (Dutch Royal Military Academy), which also had to deal with serious incidents during hazing in the past, we restructured this whole process. The confidential advisor is more clearly present: anyone who has a problem with anything, can say so immediately. The members who help out are subjected to a stricter selection process, because they have to know the codes of conduct and values of the association in detail. There is also a more rigid schedule: everyone has a clear task instead of being able to do whatever comes to mind."

The content is different too, with "much greater focus on the code of conduct and making it clear that everyone can be themselves within Tragos. Especially in the case of new members, it is good that we get through to them about this." So, participants are now spending a whole week sitting meekly in

a classroom? "No, the introduction period is obviously about creating solid bonds with students from the same year. But it is very different from before. The image of members shouting at participants all the time is not true. And it works: there were hardly any dropouts last year."

Scepticism

Still, this all sounds like a familiar story. Student associations in the Netherlands have frequently promised changes after incidents, and equally often things went wrong again – also with Tragos. And then one of the rules is to observe secrecy about what happens within the association, including cases of misconduct. How do we know for sure that something has really changed? "I understand the scepticism," says Beckers. "We are, after all, a traditional association, but our rules are also a sign of the times, there is no point in hanging onto the past. We have to look forward. Openness is a part of that. And yes, there will undoubtedly be former members who do not agree. And things will happen occasionally, just like on the street or in nightlife. But it is all about how members take action at a moment like that. In 2022, that happened

way too late. Never in a million years will that happen again. UM didn't restore its confidence in us just like that."

This doesn't mean that the cultural change is completed. "More trust and openness: it sounds easy, but takes a considerable amount of energy. To do so, you need more than eighteen months." There is still an important role for the progress committee, which will monitor the change. There will also be regular evaluations with UM. "Cultural change will be an important point during the selection of the next board. Because it is fragile. You have to stay on top of it; if you sit back, you will fall back again."

"More trust and openness: it sounds easy, but takes a considerable amount of energy"

Dennis Vaendel



Party at Tragos, August 2023 Photo: *Observant*

science

Piet Leroy, paediatrician and professor:
medical procedures often have a major impact on children

“Non-judgemental listening is what we need in healthcare”



Text: Riki Janssen
Photo: Ellen Oosterhof

Between the ages of 0 and 16, healthy children in the Netherlands receive around 20 vaccinations. A child who ends up in hospital due to illness or accident may have to endure many more jabs and other medical procedures. This can have a profound impact on young patients; some are traumatised for life. This needs to change, says Piet Leroy, paediatrician and professor in Maastricht. Last Friday, he delivered his inaugural lecture entitled *Embracing Vulnerability*.

It's a sensitive subject, emphasises Piet Leroy (1969), who has been affiliated with Maastricht University for about twenty years and has won numerous education prizes. It's about children, fear and pain. "No one in health care wants to traumatise a patient, let alone a young patient. If you bring up the subject with a nurse or doctor, you hurt their heart, making them feel vulnerable. Caring is part of their identity. They all want the best for their patients. But it's often taken for granted that the path to healing involves pain and fear. In some urgent cases, there's simply no other way; doctors must take immediate action."

But in all other cases, it's important for health professionals to realise that any medical procedure – having blood drawn or an IV inserted, getting stitches or a thorough ear exam, anything involving needles – can quickly become a negative experience. "Imagine two parents bringing their toddler son into A&E. The doctor determines the child needs antibiotics, so you need to draw blood and insert an IV. These are routine procedures, but they can have a significant psychological impact. Unlike with adults, you can't explain to the child why the needles are necessary; he only feels the pain or fear, and resists. His parents try their best but find themselves torn. They would normally comfort their son if he was in pain or distress, protect him from danger, but now they are worried and more likely to side with the doctor. This creates confusion in the relationship between parent and child."

Earplugs

Leroy knows all too well that hospitals tend to focus on efficiency. "Children easily become victims of this sometimes industrial approach to health care." In his inaugural lecture, he cited the example of a major Dutch hospital proudly reporting in its staff magazine on its solution to make blood draws on children more efficient. "Having staff wear earplugs to block out screaming children had significantly improved patient flow." Another example involved a junior doctor coming up to Leroy and asking, "How's bed 4 doing?" "He had been sent by his supervisor and was copying his teachers' behaviour. Behaviour that fits into a highly efficient system that tends to focus on disease and forget the person behind the patient."

Attentive listening

Ever since his training as a paediatrician and paediatric intensivist, Leroy has focused on making health care for children more caring. In addition to prompt and proper treatment, communication is key. "Engaging in conversation, getting to know the child, being genuinely interested, listening attentively, not making assumptions. Children don't care about what you know; they care about how you connect with them. You have to gain their trust." How do you go about building trust? There's no one-size-fits-all approach – every child is different. During

his lecture, Leroy showed photos of children lining up to be vaccinated. Some were relaxed, others hunched into themselves. "You always have to adjust your approach to the person and the situation. This can be challenging for health professionals who are used to protocols telling them exactly what, how and when to do things. But fear and anxiety require an individualised approach. That's why you need to set aside plenty of time for the first meeting. Trust has to be earned, but once it has been established, future meetings will be easier – although it remains a process of trial and error." The first meeting often sets the tone. "How do you enter the room? What words do you use? Saying 'You don't have to be afraid of the needle, it will only hurt for a second' only makes children more afraid." So what should you do instead? "To a child coming in for a blood





Prof. Piet Leroy and two of his colleagues in Maastricht hospital MUMC+

draw, you could say, 'If you keep your hand still, you'll feel yourself relax, which will help me. You'll see that we'll be done faster.' Sometimes it helps to apply numbing cream, which takes sixty to ninety minutes to take effect – this must be taken into account. Other young patients benefit from distraction, like reading a book or blowing bubbles. If none of this helps, we can use inhalation sedation, so they won't feel the needle at all."

Criticism

There has been criticism of Leroy's approach, although it has diminished in recent years as more healthcare teams have adopted his methods. "You hear two lines of criticism. The first questions whether we coddle children too much – aren't pain and fear part of life? My response: the pain a child feels when falling off the monkey bars is part

of life. It's a learning experience. But the only thing a young child can learn from a negative blood draw experience is to be afraid of needles." The second line of criticism suggests Leroy's approach is too expensive and time-consuming. "I actually believe it's more time- and cost-effective in the long run. Children who have trust and feel understood in healthcare settings grow up to be adults who are more easy-going as patients, more likely to adhere to treatment and less likely to make a complaint if something goes wrong."

Dream

In recent years, Leroy has not just conducted research on fear and trust in children in healthcare settings, but also co-organised biennial international PROSA conferences on the subject of "from fear to trust", established a knowledge centre (www.PROSAnetwork.com), assembled

"Children don't care about what you know; they care about how you connect with them"

a team of experts at MUMC+, and trained some thousand health professionals from the Netherlands and Belgium. "We always train people in teams. This is something you have to do together."

His dream is that in a few years, the approach will be so common – in other words, part of the medical curriculum and standard procedure in all hospitals – that the knowledge centre has become redundant. But we're not there yet. Leroy is

currently working with municipal health services (GGD) and the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) to develop a more caring approach to childhood vaccinations. "I'm in favour of vaccination, protecting children from serious illness. We tell parents they're good parents for vaccinating their children, but we don't explain how to do it in a more caring way. For example, a jab is much less impactful if a baby is sitting on their parent's lap, being fed. If the baby starts crying, you can immediately comfort them by cuddling them or changing position."

Funding

Making children's health care more caring won't happen overnight; widespread change requires funding, which is currently lacking. "The Charlie Braveheart Foundation has helped us so much. I hope that

health insurance companies, the government and hospitals will provide funding so that we can implement the approach more widely, starting with Maastricht University and MUMC+. My inaugural lecture received a lot of attention, which is great, but we're almost drowning in our own success. We urgently need additional resources."

Empathy

One last thing. In his lecture, he used the word "empathy" several times. "I struggled with that. We say it's good for doctors to be empathetic. But what does that mean exactly? Judith Hall, an American colleague of mine, has done wonderful research on empathy through the patient's eyes. She concluded that, to patients, empathy is mostly about active and non-judgemental listening. That's what we need in health care."

news

Questions within FHML about ancillary duties

“Zeegers’ case made many stop and think: could that happen to me too?”



Illustration: Simone Golob

The commotion surrounding Maastricht epidemiologist Maurice Zeegers, whose scientific and commercial activities are intertwined – according to *NRC Handelsblad* – brought questions about sidelines and conflict of interest into the spotlight again. Zeegers’ Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences (FHML) and the Platform Scientific Integrity (PSI) of FHML and MUMC+ devoted a meeting to those questions last Monday.

Surprisingly, nothing was said about the case itself. According to Martin van Boxtel from

the PSI, this would have been possible, “but there were no questions from the audience”. This latter was confirmed by various attendees to *Observant* (which was not allow to attend). In the meantime, the Executive Board has ordered an internal investigation into the matter. Who is actually doing this, they don’t want to say – but it should be completed in April.

Van Boxtel thinks that the commotion has contributed to the turnout: with reportedly more than sixty participants, the hospital’s Grepzaal was quite full. “I suspect that many people started to think about the subject after

the *NRC* article. They will have scratched their heads and wondered: could this also happen to me?”

Those present were informed about existing guidelines, such as MUMC+’s *Research Code* and the work done by the integrity platform, which has existed since 2018. We spoke about this with Van Boxtel, PSI chairman Matt Baker and FHML dean Annemie Schols.

Should the guidelines not be common knowledge for researchers? After all, the information is available online and new FHML researchers are compelled to take note of it. Schols thinks that “awareness is not created merely by put-

ting information on a website, but also by discussing matters together. This subject often only becomes real when someone is personally affected.”

There was no lack of questions last week: for example, when you present yourself within the framework of a sideline as ‘someone from Maastricht University’. “There is no official policy for that, so how do you deal with that?”, says Baker.

Or – the key question – when something is classified as a sideline. “There is a clear definition on our website,” says Schols, but every definition leaves room for interpretation. Editor of a scientific journal? Clearly a sideline, she states, so it should be registered.

But the chairmanship of a music association, as someone asked during the meeting? “Even that could be considered to be a sideline in a certain context,” according to Van Boxtel. He understands the request for more definite guidelines, but it is not possible to record everything in a document. Baker: “The guidelines are clear, but individual cases can be very complex.”

All three emphasise that the meeting was mainly intended to elicit a dialogue within the faculty. “That was also one of the conclusions,” says Schols: “The subject of academic integrity needs to be spoken about more often, for example within departments and in annual evaluations.”

Another matter is openness: at the beginning of this year, all Dutch universities published a register listing the ancillary activities of their professors. But what about other researchers, the (senior) lecturers? FHML does not have a central public register for them, says Schols, but they do have to inform the faculty’s director through the online Success Factors’ platform about their ancillary activities. The director has to approve those, after which they are automatically published on the personal profile page. The dean suspects “that it is not yet etched in every non-professor’s mind that – and how – ancillary activities should be raised. Hence also this meeting”.

Peter Doorakkers

Agenda academic ceremonies Aula Minderbroedersberg 4-6

14-3, 13.00 h Pascale Heins
14-3, 16.00 h Astrid Nicole Louise Hermans
15-3, 10.00 h Martine Uittenbogaart
15-3, 13.00 h Melissa Sophia Anna Maria Bevers
15-3, 16.30 h Dr. Jur ten Berg inauguratie
18-3, 13.00 h Antonio Soares Martins Neto
18-3, 16.00 h Mayra Pacheco Pachado
19-3, 10.00 h Wilhelmina Leentje (Lieke) van der Meer
19-3, 13.00 h Pia Brinkmann
19-3, 16.00 h Jinmi Zou
20-3, 16.00 h Jacqueline Rose Mary Salguero Huaman
21-3, 10.00 h Daniëlle Johanna Henrica Kerkhofs
21-3, 13.00 h Stephanie May Ashton
21-3, 16.30 h Prof. dr. Saskia Brand inauguratie
22-3, 10.00 h Anouk Tanja Rudy Weemaes
22-3, 16.30 h Dr. Inge Dijkgraaf inauguratie
25-3, 10.00 h Hansje Puck Smeele
25-3, 13.00 h Poramapa Poonpakdee
25-3, 16.00 h Sharon D’Souza
26-3, 10.00 h Qian Li
26-3, 16.00 h Mathias Dirk Gilberte Van den Eynde
27-3, 10.00 h Imke Demers
27-3, 13.00 h Lies van de Kuilen
27-3, 16.00 h Mirjam van der Ende- van Loon
28-3, 10.00 h Sorina Ruth Simon

28-3, 16.00 h Robert Josephus Johannes van Gassel
02-4, 10.00 h Ricardo Morel Berendson
02-4, 13.00 h Pascal Hildebrand
02-4, 16.00 h Kenny Antonius Geert Theodorus van Kampen
03-4, 13.00 h Lex Marinus Greeven
03-4, 16.00 h Mirna Anđelić
04-4, 10.00 h Ayatri Singha
04-4, 13.00 h Yil Severijns
05-4, 10.00 h Johanna Monika Kreutz-van Best
05-4, 13.00 h Freek Urbaan Verstraelen
08-4, 16.00 h Lena Schnitzler
Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University and University of Birmingham
10-4, 10.00 h Marta Nazzari
10-4, 13.00 h Maud Theresia Anna Strous
10-4, 16.00 h Philippe Johannus Maria Pinckaers
11-4, 10.00 h Milan Kovačević
11-4, 13.00 h Svenja Cremer
11-4, 16.00 h Geertruida Petronella Bijvoet
12-4, 10.00 h Floris Stefanus Verheij
12-4, 13.00 h Mirjam van den Brink
12-4, 16.30 h Dr. Loes van Bokhoven inauguratie
15-4, 10.00 h Najim el Khababi
15-4, 13.00 h Sabine Rosalie de Wild
15-4, 16.00 h Tim Alexander Reissner



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