Conclusion

In order to produce credible scientific advice to be used in the public arena, the council needs to set itself apart from the many interested parties and relate to them at the same time. We have discussed two ways in which this coordination is achieved. Both are crucial if scientific advice is to have a role in modern democracies. By contrast, the call for transparency or a simple minded inclusion of interested representatives in the advisory process will lead to undemocratic or unscientific decisions.

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A memorable teacher

The philosopher DJ

I failed all my A level exams the first time round, mainly because I had better things to do. I played guitar in a punk band, and I was busy playing gigs and making records.

Our first gig was at the local youth club. Our second was at Band on The Wall in Manchester, where the owner of a local record label offered to release a single for us. Punk had just smashed its way on to the music scene, and—as with all new and interesting music before and since—the disc jockey John Peel avidly championed it. He played our first single and gave us a session. Subsequently, he played our album and further three singles and was always supportive and encouraging.

For me, and countless others with a passion for music, his evening radio programmes were an intensely important part of our lives. He was famous for breaking countless bands and introducing new music to his listeners. What really mattered, though, was the bit in between the records—the sound of his voice and his wry commentary on all aspects of his daily life. Over the years, we shared with him his family's ups and downs. We knew the names of his children and his pets. Later we learnt how he coped with his wife Sheila's cerebral aneurysm and his own diabetes.

I came to medicine late in life and sometimes struggled to balance my love of music with work commitments. Punk wasn't just about music—it was also about fierce independence, and a healthy antiestablishment view. At times I wondered whether I was suited to working within such a rigid structure as the NHS.

One day, on my birthday, I emailed John Peel, telling him that I'd been listening to his programmes since the age of 14. I mentioned that I'd once played in a punk band and that I was now a doctor. He read out my email in his usual kind way and at the end pointed out that I'd neglected to mention the name of the band. As chance would have it, the band's former drummer was also listening. He emailed our band name to John, who, minutes later, announced this on the airwaves, adding that I should "be singing it from the rooftops." This not only made my day but also helped me to realise that it's OK to be a doctor and play in a rock and roll band. In fact, medicine is so diverse that it has its own rock and roll (emergency medicine), cabaret (general practice), and death metal (orthopaedics).

John Peel didn't just teach us about music. He taught us how to place passionate enthusiasm and fierce individualism into the context of ordinary life, and, now that he's gone, we're realising how much he taught us about kindness, compassion, and humility.

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We welcome articles up to 600 words on topics such as *A memorable patient, A paper that changed my practice, My most unfortunate mistake*, or any other piece conveying instruction, pathos, or humour. Please submit the article on <http://submit.bmj.com>. Permission is needed from the patient or a relative if an identifiable patient is referred to. We also welcome contributions for "Endpieces," consisting of quotations of up to 80 words (but most are considerably shorter) from any source, ancient or modern, which have appealed to the reader.