



(Document HC-3C)

Materials to Help Meeting Planners

Suggested program notes for John Paling's Health Care presentation.
(Not intended for the stage introduction but as the basis for a promotional paragraph in the meeting program.)

John Paling Ph.D. is the founder and Research Director of The Risk Communication Institute, a research and consulting organization that has many years of experience in public communications. He now helps healthcare professionals, agencies and institutions communicate more effectively with patients by building on the expertise of other professions and by sharing the lessons from his own unusual career.

John started out as a junior professor of biology at Oxford University in England and then spent two decades traveling the world as an Emmy Award-winning wildlife movie photographer and producer for National Geographic and other companies. This background impressed him with the exceptional versatility that visual communications provide for those seeking to inform lay people. It also led him to develop his own visual tools specifically for physician-patient communication.

In 2003, he was commissioned by British Medical Journal to write up his strategies for improving patient understanding and he has extended that into his most recent book "Helping Patients Understand Risks". As a professional communicator himself, he is a much sought-after speaker at conferences in Europe and America.

He approaches his topic with an acknowledgment that healthcare is the most difficult of all the professions in which to offer risk communication. He then gives abundant evidence that shows that doctors are frequently unaware of the real reasons why patients misunderstand them. Then goes on to suggest best practices for what can be done to improve the situation.

Understanding risks is the essence of all informed consent but, in truth, it is often seen as a grey formality. In contrast, Paling considers that helping patients understand risks is a golden opportunity for doctors to partner with patients and, at the same time, enhance their sense of trust.

Adopting simple decision aids not only serves as a social lubricant but also allows health professionals to provide real understanding to a far higher proportion of the patient population.