

## SESSION ELEVEN OF THE ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP

### Pandemic Response and Recovery

Monday 16 January 2023, 5.30pm, Room T, Portcullis House

#### MINUTES

**In Attendance:** Rt Hon Esther McVey MP (Chair), Graham Stringer MP, Sir Graham Brady MP, Miriam Cates MP, Rt Hon Sammy Wilson MP, Sir Christopher Chope MP, Baroness Foster of Oxtou, Earl of Leicester, Lord Strathcarron, Lord Robathan, Viscount Camrose, Lord Ashcombe, Baroness Morrissey.

**Apologies:** Henry Smith MP, Chris Green MP, Greg Smith MP, Philip Davies MP, Dawn Butler MP, Andrew Rosindell MP, Ian Paisley MP, Paul Girvan MP, Lord Moylan, Baroness Noakes, Baroness Fox of Buckley, Lord Wrottesley.

1. The Chair welcomed the APPG members to an examination of the reintroduction of travel restrictions and the Government's use of evidence-based advice and data.
2. The Chair introduced the speakers:

**Professor David Livermore**, *Professor of Medical Microbiology at the University of East Anglia (recently retired)*

Professor Livermore began by discussing China's authoritarian covid policy and the recent explosion in cases which prompted the reintroduction of pre-departure tests for travellers from China.

He went on to make several points, including that the policy failed to keep out delta and omicron previously. Due to the incubation period of omicron (33-72 hrs) it is possible to be negative when tested but infectious on arrival. The same variants are prevalent here as in China and the UK population now has substantial prior immunity. It was also suggested that it would be difficult to stop a market in fake tests.

Professor Livermore concluded that China's surge will likely burn itself out in a month, there is no reason to anticipate that China will be a major source of new variants so while pre-departure testing is pointless, "nightwatchman" on-arrival surveillance might be reasonable to track potential new variants but it won't stop the spread of them. The point was also made that China's huge surge in infections demonstrates the futility of masking, as the huge majority of the population appear to routinely use masks.

**Dr Carl Heneghan**, *Professor of Evidence-Based Medicine at the University of Oxford, Director of the Centre for Evidence Based Medicine and an NHS General Practitioner working in urgent care.*

Dr Heneghan addressed three issues: why doesn't the government respond to the most basic of questions about covid; why don't government advisors provide evidence-based advice; and why doesn't the government use the evidence and data to inform policy. Using examples he illustrated each issue. Examples included, respectively:

-The non response to questions asked in the Commons about how many tests the UK has used.

-The CMO's explanation for excess deaths, a drop off in statins, was first cited in the Technical Report on Covid in the UK which states "*There is little doubt that delays in presentation, reductions in secondary prevention (such as statins and antihypertensives)...*". But this is not backed up by Open Prescribing data.

-Using the covid and influenza surveillance data to inform policy. He also highlighted the apparent difficulty that both the government and their advisors have in expressing uncertainty.

In conclusion Dr Heneghan described recent conversations with healthcare workers on the ground, at his urgent care attendances, to understand what is going on. Among the solutions suggested to him was the need for more cottage hospitals.

3. The Chair opened the meeting up to Members' questions and discussion. Members voiced concerns about the lack of inquiry into excess deaths, with Dr Heneghan explaining that too much uncertainty and a poor evidence base will give rise to polarised opinions about the causes so the only thing to do is improve the evidence base, improve the certainty and get to the answer.

Further discussion included the Covid Inquiry and who is giving evidence, the lack of high quality evidence showing masks work, the problems faced by the NHS and how different frameworks may help more open debate and prevent the same mistakes from happening again and the political motivations that surrounded many policy decisions.

4. The Chair thanked all the Members who attended and the speakers, confirmed the date of the next meeting, 5.30pm, Monday 20 February 2023 and brought the meeting to a close.