

ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP
Pandemic Response and Recovery
Monday 22 January 2024, 5.30pm, Committee Room 19

MINUTES

In Attendance: Henry Smith MP, Lord Strathcarron, Lord Lilley, Lord Reay, Lord Robathan, Danny Kruger MP

Apologies: Graham Stringer MP, Chris Green MP, Sammy Wilson MP, Philip Davies MP, Sir Graham Brady MP, Greg Smith MP, Dawn Butler MP, Ian Paisley MP, Paul Girvan MP, Lord Moylan, Baroness Noakes, Baroness Morrissey, Baroness Fox of Buckley, the Earl of Leicester, Miriam Cates MP, Baroness Foster of Oxtou, Sir Iain Duncan Smith MP.

1. The Co-chair welcomed the APPG members to the meeting to discuss government accountability during the pandemic and hear an update on the WHO Pandemic preparedness agenda.

2. The Chair introduced the speakers, Molly Kingsley and Dr David Bell.

3. Molly Kingsley, former lawyer, children's campaigner, journalist and founder of UsForThem, spoke about the regulatory background of pharma and the gaping holes in the regulatory regime, the many vested, hidden conflicts of interest, issues on data transparency, problems with trials, systemic weakness in the regulatory framework of the pharmaceutical industry and how they still exist and likely played a part in the way the pandemic was handled. Speaking about how certain pandemic decisions were made, with knowledge of the likely harm such as school closures and the decision to roll out the vaccine to children, she used the example of the Moral and Ethical Advisory Group (MEAG), formed in 2019 by DHSC, which during the first few months of the pandemic was asked for advice and to layout ethical frameworks to help senior policy makers with their decision making but when the group started to express concerns about policies, then CMO Chris Whitty, advised the Chair not to put any recommendations in writing.

When MEAG continued to push back on policies they considered ethically contentious, by mid-2021 they seemed to be consulted less and less. Molly's findings show that by the time of the vaccine roll out to children, not recommended by the JCVI but overturned by the CMO, MEAG circulated a memo the day before a meeting with senior DHSC policy makers with negative advice on the legality, morality and ethics of vaccinating healthy children. DHSC cancelled the meeting.

In conclusion, Molly explained how MEAG was demobilised and then permanently grounded suggesting that the ethical aspects of unorthodox decisions were not considered, briefly touching on the issue of censorship and of being monitored by the Counter Disinformation Unit

and the currently unknown extent of the censorship operation.

Dr David Bell, a clinical and public health physician with a PhD in population health who has worked in global health, including with the WHO, updated the group. He talked about the work being done at the University of Leeds on the evidence-base behind the pandemic agenda and disease X and the existential threat of increased pandemics. He recapped his comments at the Group's last meeting, the WHO's sudden change from its 2019 position on the frequency of pandemics, putting into context the threat of pandemics compared with diseases like Tuberculosis (1.3mil deaths/yr).

Speaking about the G20 and World Bank 2022 report he demonstrated how the studies on which they base their findings show the opposite to what the report claims (that there is a clear threat and exponential increase in outbreaks and deaths). He showed that the data demonstrates a steady reduction in the threat and downward trends in outbreaks and disease frequency with many of the outbreaks cited being of less than 1000 deaths, and improvements in mortality being thanks to better medicine, such as antibiotics, and put much of an increase in disease frequency down to the revolution in diagnostics and increased detection.

He touched on the cost estimates the World Bank claims is needed to deal with pandemic preparedness, \$31 billion per year, \$10 billion in new funding for Overseas Development Aid, and the lack of discussion in the report of opportunity costs before concluding that the narrative behind Disease X is non-existent and whilst we will still get outbreaks, ones of the magnitude the WHO is predicting, requiring large scale intervention, are extremely rare events and it is cancers and cardiovascular disease that are still the biggest killers and of the greatest concern for public health.

3. The Chair opened the meeting up to Members' questions. There was further discussion on issues such as the Government's position, the opportunity cost of the proposed spending, the continuing censorship of counter narrative evidence as well as discussion of what actions may be taken next.

4. The Chair thanked all who attended and brought the meeting to a close. Date of next meeting TBC.