

ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP
Pandemic Response and Recovery
Monday 27 November 2023, 5.40pm, Room C, 1 Parliament St

MINUTES

In Attendance: Sammy Wilson MP (chair), Chris Green MP, Lord Reay, Lord Strathcarron, Lord Lilley.

Apologies: Graham Stringer MP, Henry Smith MP, Philip Davies MP, Sir Graham Brady MP, Sir Ian Duncan Smith MP, Greg Smith MP, Dawn Butler MP, Ian Paisley MP, Paul Girvan MP, Lord Moylan, Baroness Noakes, Baroness Morrissey, Baroness Fox, Lord Robathan, Baroness Foster, Miriam Cates MP, the Earl of Leicester.

1. The Chair welcomed the APPG members to the meeting to discuss transparency in healthcare, including in relation to the WHO Pandemic agenda.
2. The Chair introduced the speakers, Dr David Bell and Dr Margaret McCartney.

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, talked about his work with the University of Leeds REPPARE project looking at the evidence for and the transparency surrounding the pandemic preparedness agenda. Emergency powers are proposed based on the idea that pandemics are getting more frequent and there's more risk from zoonotic (animal to human). Speaking about the G20 Bali Declaration and the High Level Independent Panel and WHO/World Bank reports, he questioned how solid the data is in key studies underlying the WHO's agenda, and a number of other influential papers, pointing out that in 2019, the WHO said in 2019 that pandemics were rare events with low disease burden, and that with modern medical care their impact should fall further.

He concluded that pre-2020 numbers were driven by historic influenza outbreaks and HIV, and other zoonotic outbreaks are not substantially increasing, saying the 'exponential increase' in the G20 report does not appear consistent with the data on which these claims are based. The likely heavy influence of increased testing, including development and dissemination of PCR, is a factor which seems not to have been addressed and there is a need for a reassessment of outbreak risk, including zoonotic risk. Current financing proposals appear grossly disproportionate based on relative disease burdens. He ended by saying questions must be asked about serious conflicts surrounding what is currently being proposed as part of the WHO CA+.

Dr Margaret McCartney, a Glasgow-based GP and freelance writer and broadcaster and advocate for evidence-based medicine began by explaining the potential for conflicts of interest (COI) and bias when professional judgement concerning a primary interest, such as a patient's

welfare or the validity of research, may be influenced by a secondary interest such as financial gain. Defining the different types of conflicts, intellectual, loyalty, career and financial and the problems associated with each, she emphasised that perceptions are just as important as actual COIs, because they change behaviours and affect the way we use, see and interpret evidence.

Dr McCartney went on to discuss how to manage conflicts of interest with good disclosures and what happens when they are not managed, giving examples of medicines, medical products or advice promoted without evidence, often due to financial interests, citing the lack of transparency surrounding SAGE members at the start of the pandemic as an example. She concluded by saying that future policies would be more successful if they focussed on the potential for reducing the negative impacts of COIs, rather than relying on individuals to locate declarations and interpret them.

3. The Chair opened the meeting up to Members' questions. Discussion and questions included WHO funding, the evidence for increased zoonotic spread, ethically testing drugs to avoid COIs and conflicts in scientific research in relation to who funds the research. Further discussion focussed on the potential COIs of the JCVI in relation to Covid-19 vaccines and procurement decisions and whether COIs are currently being considered as part of the Covid Inquiry.

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