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# Covid-19: Transparency and communication are key

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As the first wave of covid-19 vaccination gets under way, the need for good communication has never been greater. Without it, the extraordinary scientific advances that have led to the vaccines' development might easily be derailed. Clumsy political jingoism almost hijacked the UK's rapid approval of the Pfizer vaccine. But the regulator has made it clear that, despite giving emergency temporary authorisation, all the usual procedures were followed.<sup>1</sup>

Now we need to make sure that the vaccination programme is implemented well, say Azeem Majeed and Mariam Molokhia, avoiding the "many mistakes made during other components of the government's response" to the pandemic.<sup>2</sup> Given that this has to be delivered alongside an expanded flu vaccination programme,<sup>3</sup> primary care must be properly funded, with special attention to protecting those most vulnerable to infection.<sup>4</sup> Internationally it also means ensuring fair allocation and equitable distribution.<sup>5</sup>

Legitimate questions about the vaccines will continue,<sup>6</sup> even after the phase III results are released.<sup>7</sup> So too will questions about how governments are making decisions. The UK's National Audit Office has been highly critical of cronyism, saying that in times of crisis it's even more important to have a clear approach to managing conflicts of interest. But Paul Thacker has found the financial ties of government advisors hard to uncover.<sup>8</sup> The membership of the UK Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) was released only after media pressure. Sadly, the same looks likely to be true for members' financial interests.

As for what the UK can learn from Slovakia's mass asymptomatic testing programme, the answer is not much, say Martin McKee and Iveta Nagyova.<sup>9</sup> That's a shame, because confusion continues to surround the mass testing in Liverpool. As more data emerge on the rapid test's low sensitivity,<sup>10</sup> the programme's always uncertain purpose has shifted: away from identifying people who aren't infected and onto finding those who are. But at what cost, asks Mike Gill,<sup>11</sup> and where is the research and regulatory oversight?

Decisions in this pandemic must be made at speed and amid great uncertainty. All the more need for proper process, transparency, and good communication.

## The BMJ Appeal 2020-21

Contributions to this year's appeal have been pouring in. Your support for the Independent Food Aid Network means more help for hard pressed families this covid winter.<sup>12 13</sup> Thank you. Please keep it coming.

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