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Sixty seconds on . . . *Contagion*

Gareth Iacobucci

As in, when a disease is spread by touching someone or something?

Well, yes. But the term contagion can also refer to situations in which ideas spread from one place to another. Which brings us neatly on to Matt Hancock.

Has he been spreading the gospel about technology again?

No, not this time. England's health secretary has in fact revealed that the UK's swift response to rolling out a vaccine for covid-19 was influenced by *Contagion*, the 2011 Steven Soderbergh film starring Gwyneth Paltrow and Matt Damon, which is about the spread of a deadly virus and the ensuing global response.

Sounds eerily familiar

Indeed. There was a surge in interest in the film last year because of covid-19, and Hancock clearly picked something up after watching it. He told LBC Radio¹ that after observing the film's portrayal of the huge scramble for the vaccine once it became available, he insisted the UK order 100m doses of the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine, rather than 30m.

How does this fit in with “following the science”?

Hancock insisted that the Hollywood blockbuster was not his “primary” source of advice, but he said it did open his eyes to the “huge” demand for a vaccine once approved. “He would keep referring to the end of the film,” one former Department of Health adviser told Sky News.²

Wow. Is Hancock after part in *Contagion 2*?

Well, Soderburgh has revealed that he is working on what he described as a “philosophical sequel” to *Contagion*, but set in a different context. If that context requires an enthusiastic go getting individual with a love of apps, then maybe Hancock could be the new Damon.

Does he have any acting experience?

Based on a recent TV clip³ in which he cried at the news of the first covid-19 vaccine being delivered, a mid-career transition from the green benches to the silver screen might not be out of the question.

- 1 Grafton-Green P. Matt Hancock tells LBC how film *Contagion* alerted him to global vaccine scramble. LBC. 3 February 2021. www.lbc.co.uk/news/matt-hancock-tells-lbc-how-film-contagion-alerted-him-to-global-vaccine-scramble.
- 2 Manthorpe R. Covid-19: Rejected contracts and a Hollywood movie—how UK struck a deal to guarantee vaccine supply. Sky News. 1 February 2021. <https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-rejected-contracts-and-a-hollywood-movie-how-uk-struck-deal-to-guarantee-vaccine-supply-12204044>.
- 3 Matt Hancock brought to tears on TV as first covid vaccinations begin—video. Guardian. 8 December 2020. www.theguardian.com/politics/video/2020/dec/08/matt-hancock-brought-to-tears-on-tv-as-first-covid-vaccinations-begin-video.