THE UK’S PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Covid-19: now is not the time to judge the UK’s response

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Scally and colleagues’ editorial on the UK’s public health response to covid-19 is disheartening. The BMJ, with its global influence, has a moral obligation to publish articles based on scientific rigour. Sadly, there has been a trend towards “tabloid journalism,” with emotive language, misleading soundbites, and cherry picked citations. Only a handful of this editorial’s references are peer reviewed research; half are newspaper articles, personal opinions, and blogs. In this era of worldwide connectivity, it is all too easy for personal opinion to be referenced, re-cited, and repeated as gospel.

International and influential journals must “challenge the status quo.” But the articles that do so need to be balanced, respectful, and accurate. The potential bias of Scally’s affiliation with Independent SAGE should be made clear, and the discreet grey box in the colourful infographic should not be the only acknowledgment that the quoted numbers are unadjusted and therefore misleading.1 This editorial does little to further our understanding of the complexities around the fast paced and difficult decisions being made by the UK panel of experts.2

The national and global responses to the coronavirus pandemic are multifaceted and challenging. Individual nations possess unique characteristics—geographically, some are isolated (New Zealand, for example), and others possess busy international travel hubs located within densely populated areas (such as London in the UK). These complexities will take time for world leading experts to unravel—pre-emptive judgments should not be made in the heat of the moment.

It seems that the 21st century model for journalism and science writing is to focus on negative, conflict based stories. Global wellbeing and mental health face an unprecedented challenge.3 I humbly suggest that a world renowned journal such as The BMJ has the capability and opportunity to encourage rigorous, relevant writing that challenges the status quo, while also presenting positive stories of “progress, possibility, and solutions.”4

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Full response at: https://www.bmj.com/content/369/bmj.m1932/rr-12

4 Positive News. www.positive.news