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COVID-19: CONSCIENCE AND DUTY FOR SCIENTIFIC ADVISERS

Covid-19: healthcare and politics are inexorably intertwined

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Abbasi discusses transparency and political interference in scientific advice.¹ It is time for our profession to accept that healthcare and politics are inexorably intertwined. This is because every healthcare decision involves resources of one kind or another. The term “independent adviser” has lost all meaning in the current era. Everyone either has an agenda or could easily have one manufactured for them.

The politicians of today are career professionals savvy in their art of political science. Healthcare professionals, on the contrary, might excel in matters of medicine but are understandably comparatively naive regarding the machinations of political life. We have devoted ourselves elsewhere. When one transitions from healthcare to politics, it should be no surprise that politics almost always wins.

What is perhaps most disheartening about the covid-19 situation is that the politics being used is that of a playground Machiavelli. It is obvious, for example, that the current political mantra of “following the science” is doublespeak, laying the foundations of the blame game yet to come. We seem to be impotent in defending ourselves against the most basic of traps. Having the chief medical officer and colleagues up on the podium in front of the nation simply allows the public to put a face to the name when the inevitable inquiry begins. Who would have guessed?

“Anything popular, do yourself; anything unpopular, use others to do it. With the one you garner affection, with the other you deflect hatred”—Baltasar Gracián (1647).²

Competing interests: Blogger at unexaminedmedicine.org

1 Abbasi K. Covid-19: Questions of conscience and duty for scientific advisers. Editor's choice. *BMJ* 2020;369:m2102doi: 10.1136/bmj.m2102.

2 Gracián B. *The pocket oracle and art of prudence*. Penguin Classics, 2011.

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