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## COVID-19 INQUIRY: NOT YET

# Covid-19 inquiry: ducking the issue, ducks in a row, and pandemic anatidaephobia

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While we await the inevitable public inquiry into the UK's management of covid-19,<sup>1</sup> it is only fair to note that the situation is without precedent. But that is the very reason disaster planning exists and, notably, the UK was until recently a global leader in pandemic preparation.<sup>2</sup>

As politicians aim to get their ducks in a row regarding what they knew and when, how they acted and on what basis, it is fair to ask whether some—not least our sesquipedalian prime minister—will have a degree of discombobulating anatidaephobia.

The commendable openness of daily press conferences highlighting mortality rates, test and trace data, and personal protective equipment problems means little new may emerge from an inquiry. Instead, responsibility for one of Europe's highest death rates<sup>3</sup> needs to be apportioned.

The reason this is both crucial and urgent is not accountability but the need for better performance. While Brexit, the potential dissolution of the UK, and international politics may be where government wishes to focus, prevention of catastrophe in the form of resurgent covid-19—this time accompanied by usual winter pressures and the consequences of accumulated missed healthcare interventions—is the national priority.

Jason Beer QC suggests a public inquiry answers three questions: what happened; why did it happen and who is to blame; and what can be done to prevent it happening again.<sup>4</sup>

Laboured inquisitional processes, such as the Levison inquiry, are unsuitable given the imminent peril. Answering the third question is key.

This matter cannot be avoided. A moral imperative exists to complete a rapid, transparent inquiry into the UK's covid-19 performance. The primary aim is not to apportion blame but to improve national performance for any resurgent pandemic with likely extreme consequences for health and social care.

Competing interests: None declared.

Full response at: [www.bmj.com/content/370/bmj.m2869/rr](http://www.bmj.com/content/370/bmj.m2869/rr).

- 1 Iacobucci G. Covid-19: PM promises inquiry but says it won't happen during pandemic. *BMJ* 2020;370:m2869. doi: 10.1136/bmj.m2869 pmid: 32675059
- 2 Wenham C. The UK was a global leader in preparing for pandemics. What went wrong with coronavirus? *Guardian*. 1 May 2020. [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/may/01/uk-global-leader-pandemics-coronavirus-covid-19-crisis-britain](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/may/01/uk-global-leader-pandemics-coronavirus-covid-19-crisis-britain).
- 3 Amnesty International. UK among highest covid-19 health worker deaths in the world. 13 July 2020. [www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/uk-among-highest-covid-19-health-worker-deaths-world](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/uk-among-highest-covid-19-health-worker-deaths-world).