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COVID-19: WHERE ARE THE LEADERS?

Covid-19: public health leaders have been exceptional, but we need a whole new approach to society

Fiona J Day *doctor and executive coach*

Abbasi underestimates the personal and professional impact of leading through covid-19.¹ I know where our medical and public health leaders have been over the past year—at the heart of the response to covid-19, supporting their staff and colleagues, patients, and their own families, collaborating at unprecedented scale locally and internationally, and advising politicians and governments.

The process of getting clear on one's values and then embodying them happens through a conscious developmental process. Adult development theories are clear that the process of individuating from socialised mindsets to those of a self-authored leader does not usually happen by chance alone, nor does the job title of a medical leader automatically enable this to happen. Only through skilled professional development do adults make these developmental shifts.

I've had the privilege of working alongside some of the UK's top medical and public health leaders in the past year, and I can reassure you that they were not "staying in the room," but were leading from the front at significant personal cost while embodying their values. When leading in complexity, knowing where to focus one's limited time and energy for maximum outcomes is key.

As a former public health consultant, I know that all generic health interventions inevitably lead to health inequalities and that any new infectious disease will inevitably become a disease of poverty and inequality. Until we have new forms of democracy based on a meta-modern society, medical and public health leaders can only exert influence on public debate and politicians rather than control them. As well as exceptional leaders, we need a whole new approach to global society if we are to face the human, social, and ecological crises ahead. And we need to recognise and thank each and every one of our medical and public health leaders for their contribution over the past year.

Competing interests: I work for Fiona Day Consulting coaching senior doctors and medical and public health leaders.

¹ Abbasi K. O leader, where art thou? Editor's choice. *BMJ* 2021;372:n809. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n809

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