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Sixty seconds on . . . food on prescription

Zosia Kmietowicz

Yum! I'll have steak with triple cooked chips, please

This is not a restaurant. We're talking about the proposal in the "levelling up" white paper for general practices to pilot prescribing healthy food to tackle health inequalities and the widening gap in healthy life expectancy around the UK.¹

Oh. How about wild alfalfa with avocado on rye?

As I said, this is NOT A RESTAURANT. And neither are general practices the place to help prise the nation from its addiction to fast food and sugar laden drinks, if reactions to the proposal are anything to go by.

What was the flavour of the responses?

You know when you suck a lemon? The GP and *BMJ* columnist Helen Salisbury called the idea "disrespectful and demeaning." "Please leave doctors out of this," she posted on Twitter, highlighting that the root of health inequalities was poverty.²

Ouch! What's for mains?

The anti-poverty campaigner Jack Monroe served up an 11 course retort to the idea of prescriptions for healthy food.³ Those in greatest need don't have the bus fare or the state of mind to engage with GPs, she said, and trying to make "overworked, underfunded, overstretched" GPs with a "shrinking resource pool" into "ad hoc social workers" won't help.

Anything for afters?

Monroe believes that the only people likely to benefit from this policy are the companies awarded the contracts to deliver them. She pointed to Chartwells, which was forced to publicly apologise after its food parcels sparked a government investigation in early 2021. Labelled "poverty picnics" by Monroe, £30 parcels were found to contain items worth about £5 in total.

So, what's the answer?

Cash first. It's a policy advocated by many charities and organisations working with people in poverty. IFAN—the Independent Food Aid Network of organisations working to end food insecurity, supported by *The BMJ's* 2020-21 appeal—says that tackling the root cause of poverty would allow everyone in the UK to buy adequate, healthy, and nutritious food.

Stuff their mouths with gold?

If you mean adequate benefits, wages that match the cost of living, and cash grants for people in crisis, then yes. IFAN says that emergency cash transfers help people afford basic healthcare, more nutritious food, and schooling, while giving people dignity, autonomy, and choice.

¹ Iacobucci G. "Levelling up" plan needs more funding and a focus on health inequalities, say experts. *BMJ* 2022;376:o303. doi: 10.1136/bmj.o303 pmid: 35121610

² Salisbury H. Twitter. 3 Feb 2022. <https://twitter.com/HelenRSalisbury/status/1489149016667533314>

³ Monroe J. Twitter. 2 Feb 2022. <https://twitter.com/BootstrapCook/status/1488901073406468102>