

Message

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Sent: 10/03/2020 10:12:52
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Subject: RE: Lancet editorial criticising govt approach

Max

I had Rory Stewart on air just ahead of me this morning. I politely told them he was wrong. I wanted to say his views were dangerous but thought about the headlines.

I think we need to strongly challenge the idea that doing something sooner is better – it is genuinely potentially quite dangerous, which is why a responsible government taking decisions based on evidence would want to make sure the timing was as good as it possibly could be for maximum effect. Applied too early we risk trying to suppress the peak too soon for it to bounce back later having enduring social and economic demise for absolutely no health or mortality benefit at all. Equally if you start it too early, for interventions which need to be quite lengthy (not the short termism being applied in Italy) you will lose good will/compliance and they become ineffective because people ignore. Of course if you have not got good command and control systems in your country in relation to health services (eg Italy) or 10 year background of planning for flu, you are probably starting from a rubbish position, but in the UK neither of the above apply. We should defend robustly (as long as politicians continue to apply the science systematically – otherwise the arguments will fall over mid-implementation).

It is not at all clear that China has been successful yet – we will need to look globally in six months time before people start judging who has been effective. Richard Horton is too early with his editorial in my view
Jenny

From: Blain, Max <Max.Blain@dhsc.gov.uk>
Sent: 10 March 2020 09:41
To: [Name Redacted] [Name Redacted] Harries, Jenny <Jenny.Harries@dhsc.gov.uk>; Van Tam, Jonathan <Jonathan.VanTam@dhsc.gov.uk>
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Subject: Lancet editorial criticising govt approach

Morning all – the Evening Standard is looking to run a story based on the editorial below by Richard Horton at the Lancet. It doesn't criticise UK govt specifically but broadly suggests that govts aren't moving fast enough or being sufficiently aggressive in their measures. They're planning to link it to Rory Stewart's recent comments.

I think Chris and CSA already answered these points yesterday on making sure we take the most effective actions at the right time. But grateful if you could let me know if there are any other points we could make in response.