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Disease Analysis

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Samir

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16th September 2022

Module 2 of the UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry
Request for Evidence under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006
Reference for Request - M2/SAGE/01/NI

Dear Mr Suter,

Thank you for your letter of 2 September on behalf of Baroness Hallett, Chair of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry. I understand similar requests have been made of academics within, or connected to, Imperial College and it would be helpful to consider my response alongside these to put my role and matters into context. Taking the questions in turn:

1. A brief overview of your qualifications, career history, professional expertise and major publications.

I am a professor of statistics and machine learning at Imperial College London and a Professor of Machine learning at the University of Copenhagen. I work on mathematical models for infectious disease. I have been a principle investigator at the MRC Centre for Global Infectious Disease Analysis at Imperial College since 2016 and was part of the so-called "Imperial College COVID response team". I have been involved in various aspects of modelling Malaria, Influenza, HIV and Dengue.

2. A list of the groups (i.e. SAGE and/or any of its sub-groups) in which you have been a participant, and the relevant time periods.

I participated in SPI-M-O starting April 2020 throughout the pandemic. Internationally, I was appointed a special advisor to the state of New York by the then governor Andrew Cuomo.

3. An overview of your involvement with those groups between January 2020 and February 2022, including:

a. When and how you came to be a participant;

I was a member of the SPI-M-O group in April 2020 due to my involvement in the "Imperial College COVID response team".

b. The number of meetings you attended, and your contributions to those

meetings;

I attended a moderate number of SPI-M-O meetings but do not have a record of the total. In these meeting I engaged in scientific discussion and presented work from my group on about 6 occasions.

c. Your role in providing research, information and advice.

I provided general scientific advice on COVID-19 epidemiology and transmission dynamics. I also presented answers to general modelling questions that SPI-M-O solicited.

4. A summary of any documents to which you contributed for the purpose of advising SAGE and/or its related subgroups on the Covid-19 pandemic. Please include links to those documents where possible.

All major finding I presented at SPI-M-O were subsequently published in peer reviewed scientific publications. Including

1. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33888533/> on estimating the efficacy of the tier system in 2021
2. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-021-26013-4> estimating the effects of non-pharmaceutical interventions in the second wave
3. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2589537021003448> informing SPI-M about the rise of the delta variant
4. <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.abh2644> characterising the epidemiological properties of the Gamma variant.

5. A summary of any articles you have written, interviews and/or evidence you have given regarding the work of the above-mentioned groups and/or the UK's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Please include links to those documents where possible.

My Covid-19 publication record of preprints, reports and journal articles can be found on google scholar https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=tL0x_vUAAAAJ&hl=en

I have not discussed the contents of any advisory group meeting discussions in public interviews. However, I have given tens of media interviews on COVID-19 more generally and spoken to trusted reporters to provide background information to explain the scientific context on topics I had published on. I did not discuss work that I had not personally undertaken.

One major press briefing I did was to present the following publication:

08-06-2020 Nature Seth Flaxman, Samir Bhatt Report 13 / Nature publication

The content of this briefing was limited exclusively to discussion about the results of the paper.

6. Your views as to whether the work of the above-mentioned groups in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic (or the UK's response more generally) succeeded in its aims.

This may include, but is not limited to, your views on:

- a. The composition of the groups and/or their diversity of expertise;
- b. The way in which the groups were commissioned to work on the relevant issues;

- c. The resources and support that were available;
- d. The advice given and/or recommendations that were made;
- e. The extent to which the groups worked effectively together;
- f. The extent to which applicable structures and policies were utilised and/or complied with and their effectiveness.

Please see below.

7. Your views as to any lessons that can be learned from the UK's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, in particular relating to the work of the above-mentioned groups. Please describe any changes that have already been made, and set out any recommendations for further changes that you think the Inquiry should consider making.

My main role in the pandemic was publishing scientific work to inform policy. My advice was therefore limited to topics where I was an expert and on topics, that I had recently published work on. My view is that the biggest shortcoming of the UK response during 2020 was a lack of a clearly defined objective function from policy makers. If this was clearly articulated, scientific focus could have been narrowed on the exact questions policy makers needed.

8. A brief description of documentation relating to these matters that you hold (including soft copy material held electronically). Please retain all such material. I am not asking for you to provide us with this material at this stage, but I may request that you do so in due course.

See the group consensus

Yours sincerely,

Personal Data

Samir Bhatt