

Module 2 of the UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry

Response to request for evidence under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006

Reference for request – M2/SAGE/01/CK

Question 1

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

- Qualifications: MA MBChB FRCPCH
- I qualified as a doctor at the University of Cape Town, South Africa in 1989 and worked there for 18 months before coming to the UK where I have worked ever since.
- I undertook my postgraduate Paediatric training in a number of teaching and district general hospitals across London and achieved my specialist registration with the GMC in 2000 in Paediatrics (Neonatal Medicine - the medical care of newborn infants, especially the ill or premature newborn).
- I have worked as a consultant neonatologist at Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust since September 2000 to date. I have an MA in Managing Medical Careers (University of Brighton 2013)
- Additional roles alongside NHS appointment:
 - Head of the Health Education England London School of Paediatrics 2014 to 2019
 - Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health Vice President for Education and Professional Development 2018 to 2021
 - Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health President May 2021 to date

Recent publications:

- Jacob H, Baverstock A, Kingdon CC. Fifteen-minute consultation: Recognising and addressing rude, undermining and bullying behaviour. *Arch Dis Child Educ Pract Ed* 2020;**105**:331-335.
- Gupta A, Babla K, Lau S, Akindolie O, Radia T, Modi N, Kingdon C, Bush A. Racial microaggressions within respiratory and critical care medicine. *The Lancet Respiratory Medicine*
- Babla K, Lau S, Akindolie O, Radia T, Kingdon C, Bush A, Gupta A. Allyship: an incremental approach to addressing microaggressions in medicine. *Paediatrics and Child Health*, <https://doi.org.10.1016.j.paed.2022.04.006>
- Radia T, Dowling N, Hewett S, McLoughlin S, Jacob H, Alviani C, Broughton S, Kingdon C. All in the mind: a mindfulness tool for trainees doi: 10.1136/archdischild-2019-rcpch.417
- Qureshi Z, Richards A, Kingdon C, Sinha I, Lokulo-Sodipe O, Rose AM. Ethnicity, child health and paediatric services. *Arch Dis Child* 2022. doi: 10.1136/archdischild-2021-323599.
- Lee A, Kingdon C, Davie M, Hawcutt D, Sinha I. Child poverty and health inequalities in the UK: a guide for paediatricians. *Arch Dis Child*. Doi: 10.1136/arch-dis-child-2021-323671.

Question 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.

Answer

I was invited to and attended the 102nd and 103rd SAGE meetings on 7 and 13 January 2022 respectively.

Question 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;**
- b. **The number of meetings you attended, and your contributions to those meetings;**
- c. **Your role in providing research, information and advice.**

Answer

I was invited to attend two meetings of SAGE by Sir Patrick Vallance, having raised concerns about the Omicron variant and its potential impact on young children with Sir Chris Whitty. This began with an email from Sir Chris on 29 December 2021 to me and Steve Powis, NHS national medical director, asking for intelligence about COVID admissions in children and young people. This was in anticipation of the new term starting and after hearing reports of an uptick in young children in the US and South Africa due to the Omicron variant.

I attended two meetings on 7 and 13 January 2022. At those meetings, I shared and discussed with attendees the data and information I had received from colleagues in South Africa on the rise in paediatric COVID-19 hospitalisations during the Omicron wave.

Following the aforementioned discussions at SAGE, it was agreed at these meetings that there was a need for relevant colleagues to hold a press briefing on the impact of Omicron on children with the aim of reassuring the public about the rise in hospitalisation of young children.

Alongside Professor Russell Viner (*Professor of Child and Adolescent Health, UCL and my predecessor as RCPCH President*), Professor Calum Semple (*Professor in Child Health and Outbreak Medicine, University of Liverpool*), and Professor Lucy Chappell (*Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) for the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC); and NIHR Research Professor in Obstetrics at King's College London*), I participated in a Science Media Centre (SMC) news briefing on 13 January 2022 titled 'Early data on omicron and hospitalisations in children'. This was an opportunity for journalists to hear key information and data from paediatricians and academics involved in the work, and to ask questions. It resulted in significant media coverage.

Question 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.

Answer

Alongside this letter, I enclose the data (documents 3, 4 and 5) that I received from colleagues in South Africa on the rise in paediatric COVID-19 hospitalisations during the Omicron wave, which were discussed at the SAGE meetings I attended. I have also attached a list of media coverage secured immediately following the SMC news briefing (document 2).

Question 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.

Answer

I did not write articles, provide interviews and/or evidence in a SAGE capacity. However, please find attached a list of media interviews that I and other current and former College spokespeople have been part of in a College capacity (document 1). These date back to March 2020. The spokespeople are:

1. Dr Camilla Kingdon, President from May 2021
2. Professor Russell Viner, President until May 2021
3. Helen Bedford, immunisations lead
4. Dr Elizabeth Whittaker, infectious diseases lead
5. Dr David Tuthill, Officer for Wales
6. Dr Ray Nethercott, Officer for Ireland
7. Dr Mairi Stark, Officer for Scotland
8. Professor Steve Turner, Registrar
9. Professor Max Davie, Officer for Health Improvement until June 2022
10. Dr Karen Street, Officer for Mental Health
11. Dr Liz Marder, Treasurer

This document also includes links to:

- RCPCH submissions to relevant public inquiries and consultations.
- RCPCH statements on COVID-19.

Question 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.

Answer

My contribution to this question can only be based on the two meetings I attended.

Based on the attendance of two meetings of SAGE, my view is that these were expertly chaired by Sir Patrick Vallance. This enabled an open and respectful discussion that in turn supported the group in reaching decisions that I deemed helpful to the UK's response when it came to the general public's understanding of the Omicron variant and the hospitalisation of children and young people.

In response to **part a**, I always felt that due to skilful chairing of SAGE my expertise as a consultant neonatologist and President of RCPCH was respected at the meetings and appropriately drawn on. I

was asked questions and I felt that my expertise on issues relating to children and young people was heard.

Based on my limited involvement, I do not feel fully able to comment on **part b**.

In response to **part c**, the briefing papers I received in advance and following the meeting were both adequate and received in a timely manner. I knew exactly what to expect when joining and was put at ease once I had joined.

In answer to **part d**, I feel strongly that the advice I gave was adequately discussed and resulted in appropriate action from SAGE. Having discussed the rise in paediatric COVID-19 hospitalisations during the Omicron wave, it was agreed that a news briefing with experts should be conducted. The SMC briefing took place on [13 January 2022](#).

In answer to **part e**, from the two meetings I attended the group seemed to work effectively and collaboratively together.

In response to **part f**, I believe my experience of SAGE provides a clear example of the group being utilised effectively. In particular, it is a strong example of how SAGE could be utilised to manage complex news in a way that did not cause undue anxiety to the general public. I first raised my concerns on the rise in paediatric COVID-19 Omicron hospitalisations with Sir Chris Whitty. These concerns were taken seriously and resulted in clear action with my invitation to SAGE by Sir Patrick Vallance to discuss the data with other members. As I have said, there was an open discussion between myself, and other experts facilitated by the skilful chairmanship of Sir Patrick Vallance. This discussion directly led to an agreement that there ought to be a clear message in the minutes, and a news briefing with journalists with the aim of reassuring the public.

Question 7

Your views as to any lessons that can be learned from the UK's response to the Covid-19 apandemic, 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.

Answer

In reference to my answer to question 6(f), I think there is a clear positive lesson to be learned here for future emergencies from my interaction with Sir Chris Whitty regarding the rise in paediatric COVID-19 hospitalisations during the Omicron wave and the speed with which this resulted in my invitation to attend SAGE and the subsequent SMC news briefing. The group was quick to act, enabled an open discussion of the evidence, and took appropriate action to reassure the public.

Question 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.

In addition to what I cited in question five, please find enclosed the documentation I discussed at the SAGE meetings, including:

- SA early wave comparison (document 3)

- Tshwane Paediatric Omicron 21 Dec 2021, Final preprint. (document 4)
- Clinical severity of COVID-19 patients admitted to hospitals in Gauteng, South Africa during the Omicron-dominant fourth wave (document 5)