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Sixth Meeting of Scottish Government CMO Advisory Group on Covid 19
13.04.2020
Held via Zoom

Welcome and Apologies

1. Chair welcomed all group members and Name Redacted

Apologies – Tom Evans, Gregor Smith

Minutes, Action Points, Chair Update

2. Chair agreed to move straight into the German Q&A. No comments on minutes and noted that the group is happy for these to be concise.

The German Approach

3. Andreas introduced himself and his work as part of the German advisory group responding to the Covid-19 outbreak.

Questions were posed by Jill, Aziz and Mary on contact tracing, testing capacity and exit strategies.

Andreas outlined that testing and contact tracing are done on a local level. Currently the proposal is to have local taskforces testing in care homes and determine those in the wider population that should get tested. These taskforces would also be tracing and following up with those who have been in contact with someone exposed. It has been estimated that 1.5-2 people will be needed per case to carry out contact tracing. A Robert Koch programme for 'containment scouts' had generated 10,000 applications.

Andreas further explained that Germany plans to create a database of those who tested negative after the disease, providing a QR code to allow them to travel and return to work. No formal exit strategy currently exists but proposals are to reopen only businesses where social distancing can be enforced and explore different digital and shift entry options for schools and university to maintain distancing.

David asked whether there is a feeling of where politicians sit with regards to how low to aim to keep R values. Andreas commented that politicians are content with an R value below 1 and they are particularly interested in the number of new cases per day – with a view at avoiding a lack of capacity in hospitals. He added that public opinion pressure to reopen businesses is also important as there have been changes in mood observed.

Stephen asked about shifts in public opinion and compliance. Andreas replied that compliance issues are mainly to do with younger people who do not comply with guidance, particularly in large cities and those with large international communities.

Mark asked Andreas about a serological survey from Bonn University that suggested that Germany could have 5x more cases than those reported and whether he thought this was valid. Andreas noted this doesn't provide a generalizable picture of the number of people affected due to sampling issues.

Andreas asked whether testing capacity was an issue in Scotland. David noted that this is growing and will be delivering about 10,000 per day by the end of the month. David also confirmed that labs in Scotland are also trying to make reagents from basic ingredients. David noted that international collaboration on effective methodologies is important.

The chair expressed his gratitude on behalf of the group for his contribution, and thanked Devi for providing the introduction. Andreas offered to pass on information about testing kits by email.

CSA Update

4. Sheila noted she and Aziz had spoken with the chair of SSAC and Aziz has also been in touch with them.

Testing Deep Dive

5. Richard informed the group that it was invited to offer its view by the following afternoon around next steps surrounding lockdown, ahead of COBRA-M this week. The chair accepted the commission on behalf of the group and asked that Aziz act as the point person for this specific commission. Aziz confirmed his agreement.

Chair noted that any advice will include some recommendations on testing. Daniel and Richard gave an overview of key points from testing paper noting the aim is to reach 10,000 tests/day by the end of this month. Mark strongly endorsed David's point that testing is not purely about numbers but also speed.

Devi spoke about prioritising, asking what are the expected numbers in each of these categories and how much capacity would then remain to test the rest of the population. Devi commented that in more remote locations, testing and contact tracing could be considered to allow these communities to return to semi-normality.

Mary, Mark and Richard noted the importance of articulating why to test in order to provide ministers with informed recommendations. The chair summarised that using science and data will be crucial to justifying recommendations. Jim, Mary and other group members raised the importance of considering the feasibility of options. It was agreed that while testing is important this cannot be presented as a magic bullet solution.

David noted there has been substantial growth in NHS capacity and growth SNBTS repurposing has also helped increase this. University of Glasgow mass testing is hoped to run at 7,000 by the end of the month.

David commented that choices will have to be made with different degrees of uncertainty. We will need to ask ourselves who is disadvantaged by different strategies aiming at lower R value. David suggested that a recommendation could be to commission work to measure the impact on different population groups.

Richard and David stressed that the group should consider all possible exit strategies and scenarios.

The group agreed that testing alone is not sufficient but an essential part of our solution. Devi noted that while there is a balance between the needs of the vulnerable and the fit and healthy this can present a morally dangerous position. We do need to do our best to protect the elderly and the vulnerable.

Angela noted the importance of developing evidence and recommendations in a timely manner to ensure these can feed into policy development.

Mark noted that the rhetoric is no longer to talk about us being a week behind London as both curves are now flattening out. Stephen commented that studies on the language of different strategies is being considered by a group in Cambridge.

Aziz asked group to confirm whether there is a need to tighten lockdown measures. The group discussed that compliance has been high so there is not currently a need for this. Mark noted that R is currently less than 1 though there is no cushion to allow for easing off at this stage.

Jill stated that we have not yet reached a final position, given options outlined in her paper. The chair suggested that different scenarios need to be weighed up as demand vs. supply.

Aziz asked whether Roger's team could model exit strategies. Roger – yes.

Concluding remarks

6. The chair summarised that it was agreed lockdown should be extended. Discussions will need to look to coming weeks and the testing and exit strategies to implement in due course.

ACTION – Group members to email Aziz with ideas to feed into the commissioned paper. Aziz asked group members to email him with ideas to go into the paper.

ACTION – Niamh to share a sample template with Aziz.

ACTION – Roger and Aziz to discuss modelling of different lockdown exit strategies.

Attendees

Advisory Group Members: Andrew Morris, Angela Leitch, Aziz Sheikh, Chris Robertson, David Crossman, Devi Sridhar, Jill Pell, Jim McMenamin, Mark Woolhouse, Stephen Reicher, Sheila Rowan.

Invited Attendees: Mary Black, Name Redacted

SG: Roger Halliday, Niamh O'Connor, Richard Foggo, Daniel Kleinberg, Donna Bell.

Secretariat: NR