

treat rheumatoid arthritis and lupus. I got straight onto Jim Bethell, who says we're already buying, though naturally there's a scramble. JVT is working out allocations between patient groups in a way that doesn't undermine our clinical trials, because it's too early to say whether it works.

Around the world, leaders are turning inwards. China has asked foreign diplomats to stay out of Beijing until 15 May. Trump has invoked the Defense Production Act to halt the export of masks and other PPE. It's hardly surprising: the US has confirmed 32,000 cases in one day, a new record. The breakdown of international cooperation just when we need it most is another sign of the enormity of this thing.

The US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) today released the first solid evidence showing that asymptomatic transmission is occurring. I've been banging on about this for weeks, but the advice I have been getting has all pointed towards asymptomatic transmission being unlikely. PHE is re-investigating. I should have pushed this much harder.

SATURDAY 4 APRIL

Carrie has Covid. She's heavily pregnant, which probably makes the symptoms feel a hundred times worse. What an awful year for her and Boris, who is now being accused by unnamed 'sources' in the media of 'stubbornly refusing to stop working'. There is growing muttering that he's jeopardising his own recovery by failing to rest. True.

Meanwhile President Trump has randomly and dangerously declared that hydroxychloroquine is an effective treatment for Covid, despite a total absence of the evidence required for such a statement. What does he know that JVT doesn't? I am despairing. What an awful, awful man.

Every day I check case numbers obsessively, hoping to see that the worm has turned. Every day I'm disappointed.

SUNDAY 5 APRIL

A cri de cœur from Helen Whately, who is under massive pressure over PPE shortages in care homes. 'It is still all over the place,' she said.

Apparently she is getting contradictory information from officials, who can't seem to answer any questions about supplies. 'There is only so long I can keep saying to the social care sector that we're working on it without losing all credibility,' she said miserably. I promised to do everything I can.

On the morning media round, I did my best to make Boris sound in better shape than he is.

'I've been talking to him every day, several times a day,' I said truthfully, adding that he's very much got his hand on the tiller. I admitted that he's still running a temperature but stressed that he's in good spirits.

After *Marr*, I found myself in the BBC green room with Keir Starmer, who took over as Labour leader yesterday. What odd circumstances in which to become Leader of the Opposition.

'At least Jeremy Corbyn becoming PM and destroying the country can come off my worry list,' I told him cheerfully.

'Happy to lighten your load,' he replied.

Scientists, politicians and journalists are beginning to ask more searching questions about the origins of the virus. The wet market theory is now looking less credible than what goes on behind closed doors at a virology laboratory in Wuhan. It just so happens that there's a leading coronavirus research facility in the exact same place that this nightmare began. More than a bit suspicious, no?

Assuming nobody intended to cause such a catastrophe, it strikes me as possible that Chinese scientists discovered the virus in the wild, took a sample to examine in the lab and then let it escape as a result of poor biosecurity. Though the international consensus and the government's position is that the virus originated at the Wuhan wet market, I remain sceptical. There must be a full investigation into what happened.

This evening, the Queen gave a special coronavirus address to the nation and Commonwealth. As always, Her Majesty struck exactly the right note, conjuring up Vera Lynn's wartime classic when she said that together, we will beat this thing – and meet again.