



Parliamentary and



Scientific Committee

Bringing Science and Parliament together

Established 1939

Covid-19 – The Statistics and the Science Underlying them

History made as the P&SC holds its first virtual meeting

Covid-19 has altered almost all aspects of life as we know it. The virus, which was declared to be a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation in March, has caused significant disruption to work, social and family life. There have been over 11 million confirmed cases of Covid and tragically over 500,000 lives have been lost worldwide, with 44,000 of those being in the UK. However, behind the statistics and figures which have saturated the news lies a complex system of data collection and analysis.

On the 29th June 2020 a Parliamentary and Scientific Committee meeting was held which not only discussed the statistics behind Covid, but also made history. For the first time ever in the committee's 81-year history the meeting was held online. The guest speakers presented to 110 attendees from the comfort of their own homes via Zoom, followed by a virtual Q&A. Despite the change in circumstances and not being able to meet in person, the quality and outcome of the meeting did not suffer. The compelling presentations and thought-provoking questions from attendees allowed for not only a greater understanding of the topic, but also much food for thought.

Data collection and analysis has been instrumental in the fight against Covid, however in the early stages there was little knowledge surrounding the virus and the rate of transmission. Statistical models were put into place to predict the spread of the virus, but as more data became available and as the

stages of the pandemic progressed so the models were adapted. However, even with all the data and resources there is still a level of uncertainty. In order to move forward and improve estimations made by predictive models, their accuracy needs to be analysed and the high-quality models can be combined to present more accurate predictions.

Countries have approached data collection in different ways with varying standards. This brings the question, how can we compare the virus management globally with such differing statistical approaches? To address this challenge there are many other considerations to take into account such as population densities, availability of healthcare, geographical factors and more. It must also be noted that different countries will not all be at the same stage of the virus, but it is vital that every nation ensures that all data acquisition is both consistent and transparent in its communication. One specific point raised was should the inclusion of indirect Covid deaths be recorded, and the simple answer was yes. All causes of death should be represented and the data should be secondarily segmented.

A major concern highlighted was the lack of knowledge surrounding the asymptomatic viral transmission of Covid. The simple reasoning behind this is that people who are asymptomatic are not being tested and it was suggested that areas which have large Covid outbreaks take part in mass testing. The results of expanding the testing could lead to the

reduction of cases caused by asymptomatic carriers.

All data collated has been analysed by large teams of STEM workers and Parliamentarians. Given that the Government's stated that their response to Covid would be 'led by Science', we are left with the question - is the data being utilised efficiently?

As the country continues to adapt and move forward from the effects of this devastating pandemic, so does the P&SC. We have taken an initial step by successfully holding our first virtual meeting. Whilst the future of our return to Portcullis House is unknown, the advancement of our online resources alongside support from our members has made the continuation of our meetings a certainty.

Charlotte Hall

P&SC Virtual Discussion Meeting, 'Covid-19 – The Statistics and the Science Underlying them', 29th Jun 2020