

# British Medical Journal accuses UK government of the “suppression of science”

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The *British Medical Journal* has published an extraordinary editorial accusing the Boris Johnson’s Conservative government of the “politicisation, “corruption,” and “suppression of science”.

Last Friday’s article concluded, “Politicisation of science was enthusiastically deployed by some of history’s worst autocrats and dictators, and it is now regrettably commonplace in democracies. The medical-political complex tends towards suppression of science to aggrandise and enrich those in power. And, as the powerful become more successful, richer, and further intoxicated with power, the inconvenient truths of science are suppressed. When good science is suppressed, people die.”

The editorial by the journal of the British Medical Association is an indictment of the British ruling class’ “herd immunity” response to the COVID-19 pandemic that has created a humanitarian disaster. At every stage, the government ignored scientists’ calls for a national lockdown and warnings about the dire implications of keeping open workplaces, schools, colleges and universities.

On November 11, the UK passed the terrible milestone of 50,000 deaths. This is the official number, now standing at 52,745, including only those who died within 28 days of receiving a positive COVID test. But according to the government’s Office for National Statistics (ONS) and statistics agencies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, there have been more than 64,000 fatalities in which COVID-19 was mentioned on the death certificate. Since the pandemic began, the UK has suffered more than 70,000 “excess deaths”.

On average over the last week, more than 410 people were being killed by the disease every day, roughly four times the average death rate a month ago. As of last Thursday, almost 15,000 people were in hospital with COVID-19, more than triple the number a month ago, and more than 1,300 on ventilators, more than double the number a month ago.

These are the consequences of a surge of infections encouraged by the reckless reopening of the economy, schools and universities in the summer and autumn months.

Officially, the seven-day average for the number of new daily cases is 25,331. But this figure is kept artificially low by the effective collapse of the government’s testing system. The ONS estimates there are around 50,000 new cases each day.

Commentators in the corporate media have seized on the ONS data to proclaim that the pandemic is “stabilising” and Johnson’s one-month “lockdown”— begun on November 4 and leaving schools, universities and many workplaces open—is working. This is cynical propaganda for the government and its murderous policies. The ONS data only shows that the rate of increase in infections is slowing, meaning the epidemic is still expanding, and from an extremely high level.

More than 710,000 people across the UK were infected with COVID-19 in the week to November 6. The  $R_0$  (reproduction rate) is estimated to be between 1 and 1.2 nationally, signifying a growing number of cases, and infection rates are increasing nationally among the more at-risk older age groups and regionally in the south east, south west, and north east of the country. Hull’s infection rate recently soared to 783 per 100,000 people—triple the average for England.

Professor Neil Fergusson, a respected epidemiologist at Imperial College London, believes the current lockdown restrictions will reduce the  $R_0$  to just 0.8 or 0.9 and even the most optimistic modelling suggests 0.6 is the lowest it will go. By December 2, when the lockdown ends, rates of infection will still be dangerously high and free to explode once again. The government’s Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) has warned that the government’s “Tier system”, which will be reimposed once the current restrictions end, will not prevent another surge of the virus in the winter.

The government only implemented the current lockdown to stave off a feared social backlash over mounting deaths and a widely predicted collapse of the National Health Service this winter. Their intention was to buy enough time to throw open the whole economy again in the lead up to

Christmas and in January, when a vast percentage of retail and hospitality trade is done.

Indicative of the profits before lives agenda is the government's decision yesterday—after big business demanded it—to exempt seasonal poultry workers arriving in the UK from abroad from lockdown rules so that they can start work straight away during what should be a 14-day quarantine. Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said it meant that food producers can “keep up with the Christmas demand” for turkey.

The corporations' Christmas profits will be bought at the cost of tens of thousands more lives. Government officials have raised the prospect of a third lockdown or a series of so-called “circuit breakers” to come, acknowledging that new waves are on the way.

Johnson is under orders from up to 100 of his MPs not to introduce any additional national restrictions that would hinder profit-making. A backbench Tory rebellion over the current lockdown was only averted with the promise that Johnson committed that it would not be extended beyond December 2. According to the *Financial Times*, Johnson told Tory donors over the weekend “that further coronavirus lockdowns could be avoided.”

Another healthcare catastrophe is building up. In the summer, the NHS Confederation was warning that the waiting list for NHS treatment could reach 10 million by Christmas. The NHS reported in September that 2 million people had been waiting for more than 18 weeks. As of last week, nearly 140,000 of people had been waiting more than a year—the highest level since 2008. The number was just 1,600 this February.

There have been 19 million fewer dental treatments since March compared to the same period last year and as of September-October dental practices were still operating at just one third of the normal level.

Roughly 300,000 fewer people have seen a cancer specialist for an urgent check-up this year compared to last—a drop of a quarter. And the number of people starting cancer treatment is down by a fifth. In July, the Health Care Research Hub for Cancer predicted that the UK could suffer between 7,000 and 35,000 additional cancer deaths within a year due to this disruption. The British Heart Foundation reports that Britain has already seen an additional nearly 5,000 deaths caused by heart problems since the pandemic began—a 7 percent increase.

The death merchants in ruling circles trying to sell these figures as an argument against lockdown restrictions are advocating a crime against humanity. All experience shows that, left unchecked, the COVID-19 virus spreads rapidly through the population and overwhelms healthcare systems.

A concerning phenomenon is “long COVID”—a battery of

long-term symptoms following a COVID-19 infection, which most commonly include fatigue, brain fog, breathlessness, and body pains. Little is known about this condition, but it points to the disease's potential to do lasting damage to an even greater number of people than it kills.

Preliminary data from a University of Oxford study of 58 hospitalised COVID patients found that 60 percent had abnormalities in their lungs, 29 percent in their kidneys, 26 percent in their hearts and 10 percent in their livers two to three months after their infections. The study also found tissue changes in parts of the brain.

A separate study issued preliminary findings into the impact of “long COVID” on low-risk individuals—the young and those with no major underlying health conditions. The Coverscan study reported that of 200 low-risk individuals, 70 percent had impairments in one or more organs four months after infection, and 25 percent had impairments in two or more organs.

MPs have been told that up to 500,000 people in Britain are living with such long-term effects. Yet only a paltry £10 million has been allocated to the NHS to set up specialist treatment centres and provide care.

The healthcare crisis is being exacerbated by widespread socio-economic distress. The Resolution Foundation reported Sunday that “three-in-ten adults who have seen their income fall throughout the crisis are now experiencing material deprivation.” Former Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown warned the government in response, “If they don't announce a new anti-poverty programme they will face a rebellion across the country.”

Nothing short of a massive redistribution of social wealth from the coffers of the financial and corporate oligarchy can address this catastrophe. The pandemic must be brought under control through the necessary public health measures until a vaccine can be deployed, with full support for children required to miss school and workers kept off work. Billions must be poured into health care, public health, and social care infrastructure.



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