

Letter to the Health Secretary

Dear Matt

Thank you for your tireless work to bring down the death rate and slow the spread of this nasty disease. You have asked MPs to share ideas and concerns with you as you battle the virus. You have always rightly stressed that you will take advice from medics and scientists and be guided by their professional expertise. In your position you have access to the best advice the country can offer, to various strands of academic work on the nature and behaviour of the disease, to the experiences of doctors dealing with seriously ill patients and to pharmaceutical companies seeking drugs and a vaccine.

There are various opinions coming from medics and scientists as they seek to understand and treat this new disease. Your medical and scientific advisers have to draw together the strands and make judgements about what is best advice. I think it would help the public understanding and support for the policy if you could set out more information about current professional thinking in the following important areas.

1. Treatments for Covid 19. Several existing drugs have been proposed as alleviating symptoms or shortening time to recovery. The UK is I believe undertaking trials of these drugs to see which if any works. Can we have a progress report?
2. Understanding the serious forms of the disease. Is it correct that whilst many die of a pneumonia like disease of the lungs, some die from excessive blood clotting and others from attacks on various organs of the body? If so, what different treatments are being used to combat the different versions of the disease?
3. Given the way the disease spreads in hospital and care home settings, why do we not move to identifying some hospitals as isolation hospitals specialising in Covid 19 and free others for non Covid patients?
4. You place great emphasis on R or the transmission rate, and are now supplying calculations of this rate by region. Does the UK yet have random sampled test results of the population as a whole, as this over time would presumably give the most accurate view of the transmission rate. When will we have a sufficient time series of such data to be more accurate over R which is often currently expressed as a wide range.
5. Face masks are regarded as an important part of protective clothing for nurses and doctors treating Covid 19 patients. We all agree they should have them and supplying them is the priority. Both voluntary and commercial effort could make other masks for people going into social and work settings to offer some protection against spreading a disease they may not know they have. Is guidance going to be modified, subject of course to the overriding priority of supplies of surgical grade masks for those nursing and treating Covid patients?
6. What do your advisers think about the use of Vitamin D to strengthen people's defences against the virus?

Yours

John