

# My Speech in the International Health Regulations 2005 e-petition

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con):

I hope that the Minister will listen very carefully to the debate and the petitioners, because it would be a grave error were the Government to sign a treaty that gives away important powers over the future conduct of health policy. It is wrong to give to the WHO the sole power to decide when there is an emergency, and it is wrong to give away our powers of self-decision were such an emergency to be visited upon us.

We are, of course, members of the WHO, and I think we all agree that we should continue to be members of the WHO. We should share our information; we should draw on its research, and it will draw on research and knowledge in this country, where there is much medical and pharmaceutical company expertise, and together, as collaborators, we may get to better answers in the future. However, it would be quite wrong to vest the power of decision in people so far away from our own country who are not in full knowledge of the local circumstances.

Before any such power is vested in the WHO, there should be a proper inquiry and debate about how it performed over the course of the most recent covid pandemic. Why, for example, did the WHO seemingly concentrate on vaccines, rather than other methods of handling the problem? Why was there the delay or difficulty in testing existing drugs, which had already passed proper safety procedures and might have had beneficial or easing effects for those who got the condition? Why was more work not done on use of ultraviolet light behind the scenes in airflow systems, to clean up air when circulating? Why was more consideration not given to isolation hospitals and health centres, given that, unfortunately, quite a lot of the disease was spread through health premises. With the use of isolation, other healthcare could have continued during the course of covid treatment without so much cross-contamination within general hospitals. Why were there not recommendations and advice on isolation?

Why was there not more careful consideration of whether it would be better to concentrate on ensuring that those who were most vulnerable were protected from the presence of the disease as much as possible, rather than trying to lock down whole populations and then having to make exemptions so that we could keep the lights on and some food could be delivered to people's homes? There was something rather arbitrary about who was allowed to go to work and who was not.

Why was more work not done by the WHO on cleaning up the data? We were given comparisons between countries, but when we looked beneath the data, we discovered that those countries were using very different definitions of what a covid death was. In individual countries, under the impact of the wave of the disease, there were often great difficulties in carrying out proper

diagnosis of whether someone did have covid, or whether other medical problems that the person was suffering from were more likely to have caused the death. Some countries took a very tough line, saying that anybody with covid died of covid, even though they might have had lots of other conditions, so those countries had big figures, while other countries took a rather narrow view and said, "Well, this person was in their mid-80s and they were suffering from another a number of other conditions that might have led to the difficulties."

Andrew Bridgen:

Does the right hon. Gentleman share my concerns that the WHO refuses to conduct any review of the recommendations it issued during the covid-19 pandemic, so sure is it that its advice and recommendations were absolutely perfect? If we sign up to these instruments, we will only get more of the same.

John Redwood:

That is one of my worries. We need more transparency, debate, discussion and challenge of those in the well-paid positions at the WHO, so that science can advance.

As I understand scientific method, it is not choosing a limited number of scientists and believing everything they say; it is having a population of talented and able scientists who challenge each other, because then we get more truth out of the challenge and exchange of ideas. We do not want an international body saying, "There's only one way to look at this problem or to think about it." We need that process of challenge, and we need it to be an accelerated process. When we have an urgent and immediate need of better medicines, vaccines, procedures and approaches to lockdown or non-lockdown, that is surely the time for healthy debate, constant review and sufficient humility by all of us who venture opinions, because time and events could disprove them very quickly. If that happens, we should learn from the process and be honest about it, rather than saying that we were right all along and there was only one possible approach.

That is all I wish to say, that I think we need much more accountability, exposure and proper debate. Yes, the WHO can make an important contribution and can be a forum for scientists, pharmaceutical companies and others who will be part of the solution should we get some future wave of infection, but please, Government, do not trust it with everything. Do not ensure that future Ministers are unable to act responsibly and well in response to public opinion and to medical opinion within our own country. Do not sell us short, because that would also sell the world short. This country has a lot to offer in these fields, and it will be best if we allow open debate, proper review and serious challenge.