

Deaths with and from CV 19

The UK government has rightly worried about deaths from CV 19. It has used these concerns along with worries over hospital capacity to treat seriously ill CV 19 patients to drive its anti pandemic lock down policies. The government has repeatedly said it wishes to be data driven. This requires consistent and accurate data over time to help inform policy decisions

I first took up issues of data adequacy with the government on April 11th 2020. I reiterated and enlarged my concerns on this site on April 26th, May 22nd, November 7th and at other times. I asked how the UK defined a death caused by Covid 19, how it handled deaths with Covid 19 where it was not the main cause of death, and what use it made of deaths attributed to or with CV 19 when there had been no test on a patient to establish they had the disease. We know from the public daily reporting that the UK has adopted a standard of notifying CV 19 linked to a death if the patient has had CV 19 during the 28 days prior to death whatever other health problems they also experienced.

Others have now taken this up. People have come forward to complain that their relatives did not think their family member died of CV 19 yet it appeared on the death certificate. Doctors have explained that in some cases mistakes were made, in some cases the death certificate correctly identified other causes of death but needed to cite the presence of CV 19 at some point during the last 28 days of life. These figures matter, as people make international comparisons without being able to adjust the figures for the differing criteria adopted to define a CV 19 death. If you are going to be data driven you need to understand what your data means, and understand any weaknesses or possible errors in its compilation.

Using the global published figures the UK comes out as below the countries with most cases per million people, but at the top of the lists of deaths in relation to case numbers. Assuming the high level of testing adopted in the UK has come up with a realistic view of the total number of cases, this leaves us with the need for an explanation of why alongside Belgium we have the relatively high death rate of 2.9% of all identified cases, compared to the USA at 1.79% and figures closer to 2% for many other advanced countries. It looks as if the UK has ascribed more deaths to CV 19 than comparable places. I do not want to argue that our treatments have been less effective, given the huge efforts contributed by UK medical science and NHS staff to the task.

I suggest the government sets some data specialists onto the task of auditing these figures and adjusting where necessary. It does not seem fair to the NHS to leave the world with the impression we had a higher death rate from this disease given the many queries of death attribution we are now seeing. As many of the people who were recorded as dying of CV 19 were over 80, they belong to the generation that is likely to have other medical conditions that could have been the cause of death.

Scotland's government

It wasn't meant to be like this. Gordon Brown and Tony Blair pushed through devolution for Scotland, telling us that would kill off the nascent Scottish independence movement. I wrote at the time:

"Usually , the granting of more and more powers for separate development and separate government within a once unified state leads inexorably to stronger nationalist movements" (The Death of Britain? 1999)

I drew attention to the many ways a canny Scottish government could press for more powers and exploit the compromises of the settlement. It always looked like a political journey, not a fixed constitution. The SNP could blame the UK government for things that went wrong and demand more powers to fix them.

Some defenders of the Union still think Gordon Brown was right, if only the UK Parliament grants a few more powers. They naively think that there is some amount of power for a devolved Parliament that will satisfy nationalists. Surely we have seen enough to know that whatever powers they have they will want more, because they do want their version of independence.

Today I would be interested in your thoughts on the state of Scotland's government and Parliament. I myself have no intention of rushing to judgement or intervening in the tense battles between the present and former First Ministers. This is a debate best conducted between those involved and through the voices of the Scottish parliament, now at the very centre of the row. We have heard Mr Salmond's serious allegations about the conduct of the senior Ministers and Law Officers, including allegations of misleading the Parliament and obstructing the work of its Committee trying to get to the truth. We now need to hear the government's defence.

My question during the Growing Back Better Report, 25 February 2021

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I strongly support the green VAT cuts. Did the Committee examine the future of the petrol and diesel car industry, and especially the future of the diesel engine parts, with all the skilled staff and big assets, if the Government move to an early ban on these new vehicles?

Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his

question.

The Committee is taking an interest in the impact of a transition from the current economy, with its carbon-intensive sectors, to a net zero economy. We are looking at our future programme and some of the impacts of green jobs, which we are in the middle of an inquiry on now, and we will be addressing specifically the point that he makes about the impact on the motor sector.

In the future, we are interested in some of the impacts of moving from an internal combustion engine source of transport to electrified transport and what that might do across different transport sectors. We will be working with the Transport Committee to ensure that we do not duplicate efforts, but that we are able to look into those matters.

My question during Business of the House, 25 February 2021

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): As businesses large and small need more orders to power jobs and economic recovery, can we have a debate on Government buying? Can we learn from the great success of buying so many vaccine doses from UK science and facilities, and buy more innovative and competitive goods and services from companies here at home?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees Mogg): My right hon. Friend, as always, raises interesting and important points.

The Government are planning on creating a much simpler and nimbler procurement system, which will open up procurement opportunity to small and medium-sized businesses. However, I hope he will contribute to the Budget debate that is coming up, which will be an opportunity to talk about these matters at greater length.

The rise of the pound

In the first two months after our exit from the single market and customs union, the pound has risen against the dollar, the Euro and the yen. It is up by 3.6% against the dollar and Euro, and by 8.6% against the yen. In the referendum campaign I rightly criticised the silly pessimism of Remain forecasters saying there would be large falls in GDP immediately after a Leave vote, a collapse in house prices and a surge in unemployment. On sterling I merely said that the pound would doubtless continue to fluctuate

once we had voted to leave as surely as it had varied widely during our period in the EU. I thought relative interest rates, QE rates, dollar money policy and the other usual issues would have more impact on the pound than Brexit. So it has proved.

Today the pound is at the same level against the dollar and the yen as it recorded before the referendum vote, a time when the establishment and market view was that Remain would win. It would not have been easy to forecast that the pound should now be exactly where it was against the dollar and yen after a Leave vote and after exit given the elapse of time and the many other influences and variables involved. It should worry Remain forecasters that their one remaining gloomy forecast of a big fall in sterling has not proved to be right either. The pound is down by 5.5% against the Euro over the same time period, as the Euro has appreciated against the dollar and yen.

The future of the pound is never easy to forecast given the huge volumes of currency transactions and the differing money policies of the USA, Japan, the Euro area and the UK. We seem to be living through a current period of dollar weakness, probably reflecting the very loose money and fiscal policy being pursued in Washington. The rise this year so far in sterling will help limit inflationary tendencies on all those imports and will make exporting a bit more difficult. What is interesting is that in the first two months of exit sterling has risen against all major currencies including the Euro.