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We should beware the false assumptions spurring us on into a second lockdown

Alexandra Phillips 2 November 2020 • 3:00pm

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We were told over the weekend that when the latest catastrophic figures from Sage were shown to Ministers, there was little anyone could say. Yet today, it has emerged that the projected fatalities used to justify a second crippling lockdown are not only out of date, but compared to current counts, [already four times too high](#).

The scenario of 4,000 deaths a day, produced by Cambridge University, has been subsequently revised down by the same scientists, while far less doom-laden predictions from other research institutions were discarded. This has generated blue on blue reaction, not only from [the director of the Centre for Evidence Based Medicine at Oxford University](#), who believes the Cambridge data to be up to five times exaggerated, but from backbench big hitters, such as [Graham Brady](#) and [Iain Duncan Smith](#), both of whom have indicated they may vote down the latest measures on Wednesday.

What is clear is that there is [no such thing as 'The Science'](#). Whatever the government claims to be guided by, precipitating such draconian and masochistic measures would be better

described as potentially perilous orthodoxy.

Throughout history, science has often fallen on its own sword. From Galileo's "and yet it moves" utterance, when forced to publicly recant his claims that the Earth goes around the Sun, to the never-materialising millennium bug, to flip-flopping on diesel cars that saw such vehicles increase tenfold on UK roads before it was determined this contributed to thousands of premature deaths, scientific orthodoxy can, and often does, change dramatically.

A key criticism of Sage is that the models used to test against NHS capacity are [mathematician-led, not epidemiologist-driven](#). The original Imperial College model used at the start of the crisis was found to be based on code so buggy it took significant efforts to clean up. Professor Ferguson's predictions now look wildly over-projected. Let's not forget, the current full modelling to justify this second lockdown has yet to be shared - all the public is being given is hand-picked, doom-mongering predictions.

Sage modelling relies on two potentially flawed assumptions that would have a dramatic impact on projected deaths if wrong. The first is that there is no pre-existing immunity to Covid 19. Yet many people are asymptomatic, and it is a widely held view among those studying rhinoviruses that coronaviruses invite a degree of innate immunity from sections of the population.

The second is that the percentage of the population already exposed to Covid is just seven per cent. This figure is based on antibody testing subsequently revealed to account for a limited fraction of cases, with far more illusive T Cell serology not factored in. The percentage of viral spread in the UK [could be as high as 30 per cent](#).

If both Sage assumptions in these areas are wrong, this would drastically throw out modelling and dramatically decrease the potential death rate from a figure based on over 90 per cent being vulnerable to infection to one extrapolated from an estimate that only a quarter of the population could contract and spread the virus.

We also know that Sage uses an estimated Covid lethality of 0.9 per cent not updated since February and now contested as more global data is gathered.

Most alarmingly, however, is the gagging and defaming of preeminent international scientists opposing assumed orthodoxies on Covid. Epidemiologists from Oxford, Stamford and Harvard who produced the [Great Barrington Declaration](#) have been falsely accused of alt-right links as an act of censorship. This ugly backlash, including social media blackouts, exposes an authoritarian approach to scientific groupthink that throughout history has always spelled trouble.

There is no such thing as 'The Science', only a myopic and potentially dangerous application of dogma that refuses to move in the face of mounting contrary empirical evidence.

Anyone would forgive a Government for verging on the side of caution. However, the real danger is when those in charge claim that there is a knowable "right way". Especially when the purported cure could be deadlier than the problem.