

## **The price of ignorance.**

*"If you think education is expensive, try ignorance"*

-National Union of Teachers' bumper sticker, based on a quote  
by Robert Orben, frequently misattributed to Derek Bok.

Occasionally, something happens that drives home just how badly the education system of this country - and of course I include myself in this - has failed to do even a basic job of equipping everyone to understand and make judgements about information. What has recently happened to me has not only illustrated that point, but has also made the more worrying point that where educators have left a vacuum, charlatans are only too pleased to rush in and fill it.

Anyone who follows these blogs will know that my lab plays a very modest but hopefully helpful role in the global fight against COVID-19, having created and updated a database of properly sourced and curated information on the pharmacology of SARS-CoV-2 infection (see links), and having participated in a major 'roadmap' review of the state of the field last year. I also happen to have helped, as a member of a voluntary organization, in drafting working rules to maintain safe social distancing and hygiene to minimize the chances of viral spread between members of that organization as they work together on tasks of site maintenance and environmental improvement. There was nothing remotely unusual about these working rules, but my connection to them and the fact that some members know my day job led to various conversations about the virus. Most were sensible, and in general people were wanting assurance about whether corners were cut in developing vaccines so quickly (no, they were not - a huge amount of money was spent in accelerating the process so that things could be done in parallel and at massive scale, and be worked on 24/7).

But then I received a surprising e-mail from someone at the time connected to the organization, who clearly did not like our taking measures to mitigate viral spread, and did not like overhearing me answering someone's questions about the virus while we chopped up a tree that had fallen across a path. The e-mail appears below and, despite the implication of his constantly spelling 'gaol' the American way as 'jail', the author is British:

*You Anthony Faucci Gates Rockerfella Witty are all heading to jail. And the vaccination is not a vaccination it is untried technology. Spike proteins take over the executive function of our immune system. Anyone who has had the jab have not been properly informed. Indeed they are part of human guiniepig trials. Faucci has let this out and you all will be in jail.*

*I have followed this from a Law prospective from the start. Many Laws have been broken .I study two subjects health and Common Law. I know the whole pharmaceutical industry will fall due to the scam\_demic. Pcr test has been ran over 40 cycles and used as a diagnostic tool. The man who invented the pcr test. Was killed a week after raising his concerns about the validity of the test. Indeed hydroxocloquine is safe patented and available and cheap. Proven to be effective in sars cov2 there are others.*

*Everyone involved gates faucii WHO you will be put to death for crimes against humanity. Many others. Doctors nurses anyone involved in this may face Neurombourg trials. Many will lose their lives. Nearly all mgs staff have broken their oath. Whistle blowers buses are openly standing up as their wards are 100% full of those who had both jobs. Given the deaths we are looking at genocide. Prior to the scam\_demic kicking off. Our government repealed genocide. Nice try but it will not wear at Neurombourg. You are all Treason. There is a court case pending.*

*Regarding you amigos. whitty etc. Germany italy uk america are mounting court proceedings. Italy did post mortom on deceased cov patients. More bizarrely post Morton's were not allowed under the directive of the WHO. The plot thickens. It's stinks to high heaven. They stopped animal trials as it was killing the animals. That evidence is admitted to cases around the world. Remember the jews. Book burning and genocide. Aquanasi jews. Faucci gates etc are natzis. Things they did in college are coming out. They were both room mates. The case against them all of you is strong.*

An 'interesting' e-mail to receive on a Sunday evening, you'll agree. I did not engage with it - it was too unhinged - except to send a polite acknowledgement and a link to the NHS COVID information site, just because it would have felt wrong not to connect someone with real facts however much he was likely to reject them. I had wondered how to react if I encountered this character again, but in fact he left the group soon after so I need not worry about this any more.

It did occur to me that this was one tiny, trivial and I assume harmless taste of the kind of thing that high-profile communicators about COVID are facing every day, and my respect for them carrying on in the face of this stuff has only increased.

One thing that did strike me about the tirade, though, was its air of having 'inside information' (all that stuff about court cases pending, and the nonsense about Kary Mullis, the inventor of PCR, who in fact passed away several months before the first cases of COVID-19 were reported in China). It was as if this person was caught up in a fantasy world of his own. And what did Common Law have to do with it?

Anyway, I had more or less forgotten about this person and their e-mail, until I heard some

particularly ridiculous news. A few days ago (17th August), a largely English rabble turned up in Edinburgh and attempted to "seize" Edinburgh Castle. They claimed the right to do this according to 'Article 61 of the Magna Carta', which they claimed gave the people the right to take things from corrupt governments. To the jeers of lookers on, one claimed "*Treason's been going on for that long now, we can't sit back and let everybody perish under the stupid legislation and fraudulent government tyranny, so let's just take it all back, not just the castle*". They seemed surprised at the reception they received among the onlookers, probably because they did not realize how annoying it was to Scots for them to imply that the Magna Carta (signed by the English King John) applied in Scotland, which it emphatically does not. It pre-dates by several centuries the Union of the Crowns, when the Scottish King James VI took over the throne of England (yes, that way round), where he was known as James I. Scotland has its own legal system and always has. Any English constitutional lawyers who happened to be passing would no doubt know that even in England, Clause 61 gave no powers whatever to the ordinary populace and, in any case, it was repealed in 1216. Police Scotland allowed these folk just enough time to make complete idiots of themselves, then calmly removed them.

What struck me about the news was the word 'Treason' again, which had turned up in the e-mail to me, in an apparently meaningless sentence fragment. And there seemed to be the same sense of an alternative reality in these people's heads.

A few minutes with a search engine (duckduckgo, which returns results independent of any browser history, so you should be able to get the same results with it), and key words like 'common law' and 'treason', unearths a network of web pages that present nonsensical legal mumbo-jumbo of the kind that might apply, for example, in the constitution of a fantasy country in a computer game but not in our real one. A particularly bonkers example is <https://www.we-the-people.co.uk/>, which purports to present a legally enforceable demand on Chief Constables (leaders of English Police forces) to investigate reports of - you guessed it - 'treason'. It includes phrases such as 'If current serving police constables will not defend the sovereignty of the people of the realm, whilst continuing to serve treasonous usurping forces, then it leaves no option but for the people to police and defend the realm themselves', and pieces of text that could have come out of an Orwell book, except that they are too heavy-handed. For example, the 'The traitor Prime Minister Harold Wilson, back in the 1950's stopped universities from teaching constitutional law (common law) as part of this treasonous plot' [HW

was PM in the 60s and 70s, not the 50s, and of course did no such thing]. It goes on and on, threatening all sorts, and being some sort of an outline plan for revolution. On that same site is a load of nonsense about a court case being brought by Greater Manchester Police against some combination of COVID vaccine manufacturers and radio mast operators (I confess I lost patience in trying to understand it). Connected by hyperlinks with all this are websites run by organizations such as the 'World Doctor's Alliance' - whoever they are - containing more legal mumbo-jumbo intended to intimidate schools and others in their attempts to protect children from COVID-19.

I did not spend long following this - it was too silly and boring - but did spend just long enough to realize that it would be entirely possible for someone to enter one of these sites and keep clicking and keep finding the same reinforcing ideas echoing round and round the web of them. I am lucky enough to have been offered the chance of a good education, one benefit of which is to be able to bring a critical mind to new information and to have the skills to research in many different ways. But to someone who thinks reading websites is automatically the same as 'study' or 'research', and who has no real background in critical appraisal of (alleged) information, all of this could seem very real (remember the '*I study two subjects health and Common Law*' in the long e-mail I quoted?).

And that is what I meant about others rushing in to fill any vacuum left where real education fails. I know that in our university outreach activities, at least the ones I have experienced, we never encounter people like the one who wrote me that e-mail: we almost always reach people who are already well educated, and want to learn something more. Schools should be able to reach everyone, but clearly do not. But somebody reaches them. Somebody knows how to get these people, who presumably were poor students in school (or they would have acquired critical faculties and the habits of careful research with truly independent sources), to be fanatical 'students' of a fabricated world view.

We, the people in the white hats, need to reach them too. Also, as educators, we need to learn from those who are reaching them now, because they seem to know more about how to capture the interest of those who did not thrive in normal education far better than their real teachers did. At the moment, they are being triggered to do silly, basically harmless things like laying claims to mediaeval castles. But the scenes across the Atlantic, in Washington DC back in

January, are a clear warning that while virtual reality can be fun, realized virtuality can be very dangerous indeed (and not just potentially: by the time that Washington incident fizzled out, 5 people had died).

**Links:**

Our COVID pharmacology database - <https://www.guidetopharmacology.org/GRAC/CoronavirusForward>

Jamie Davies, Edinburgh, August 2021