**UK government Covid19 press conference 7 April 2020**

**Jeremy Hoad**

(usual caveats apply to this live transcript / commentary)

**Attending**

Dominic Raab, Foreign Secretary

Sir Patrick Vallance, Chief Scientific Officer

Chris Whitty, Chief Medical Officer

**Figures**

213,181 tested

55,242 positive

18.589 hospitalised

6,159 dead

(no number given for last 24 hour deaths)

**Raab**

PM receiving very best care, stable overnight, breathing without assistance, remains in good spirits

Groundswell of messages of support at home and from leaders across the world

PM has asked Raab to deputise while he recovers

Not just the PM, also our boss and also our friend

Thoughts and prayers with him and his family

One thing I know is he’s a fighter and will be back with us in short order

PM’s team will not blink or flinch from task at hand

Will keep calm determination, unity of purpose

Cabinet had reports across all priority areas across health and econcomy

Action plan aims to slow the spread of the virus to protect NHS’s ability to cope

At every step we’ve been following scientific and medical advice so we do the right thing at the right time

Every death is a tragedy

Thoughts and prayers with families of these people

**Vallance**

Slide

Brand new illness

Transits relatively easily

Important to break transmission hence social distancing

Substantial reductions in transport

Slide

Fewer new cases appearing is the aim

16/3 – 7/4 data

Possible seeing beginning of flattening of curve but won’t know for a week or so

Imp to keep cases down to reduce people going into hospital

Slide

Hospital admissions

Steady increase but no accelerated takeoff

Possible start of flattening, won’t be sure for a week or so

Imp to carry on with these measures

Imp to keep ICU numbers down

Big thank you to frontline staff

Clinical trials starting, now 1,900 patients in trials

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ICU beds numbers increasing, most marked in London but will increase across country

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Takes a few weeks for measures to flow through

UK is on track, a couple of weeks behind France, a few weeks behind Italy

Expect deaths to start coming down in 2-3 weeks

**Questions**

If there’s a disagreement in Cabinet who makes the decision?

Raab – collective responsibility applies as usual but we have very clear instructions from PM

Arrangements clear, PM asked me to deputise for him

We arte all focussed with a clarity of purpose

(general restatement, won’t admit to making a decision if needed)

Will there be enough ICU beds

Vallace – Always times when ICU beds top out in hospitals every winter

Things seem to be tracking in the right direction

Do you (Raab) have authority to make decision on change of direction if needed?

Raab – I’ve been given clear instrcutions, normal Cabinet collective responsibilities apply

Rate of growth in. deaths in Germany MUCH slower, what can we learn from Germany

Vallance – we look at other countries all the time

Variations of demographics, systems, responses

Whitty – Germany got ahead in terms of testing, there’s a lot we can learn from that

(ie government failed in stopping testing earlier)

All at Sky News send their best to PM. PM, CMO and Health Secretary responsible for telling people how NOT to get it got it so how was that allowed to happen?

Raab – virus is indiscriminate we all need to follow letter and spirit of guidance

Whitty – extremely easy virus to pass on that’s why lockdown was put in place even if people take really careful precautions such as washing hands

(so why the delay from government earlier?)

Looming decision about extending lockdown or l;ifting it – how?

3-4 weeks behind Italy so why are we getting similar outcome to Italy and should we have done things differently?

Raab – remain focussed on key message adhering to guidance

Sacrifices people are making is working, risk losing gains, keep up discipline and follow that example

We will be guided by evidence on social distancing and impacts and monitor data only then can we can consider when or how we might take further measures

(won’t be drawn on exit strategy etc.)

Vallance – pandemic so its everywhere across diff countries and populations

We may not end with same numbers as Italy

Most important thing is to implement measures and keep virus suppressed

Will we see 3 week review as promised or wait until PM out of hospital

Raab – will be evidence based

(basically refused to answer the question on whether there would still be a 3 week review)

LSHTM suggested lockjdown would be needed for months not weeks?

Raab – we have always levelled with people

We will take evidence based decisions

Change only after we are past the peak but we are not there yet

Whitty – decide what combinations of things over what time might be taken after peak

Are we on target for 100k tests per day by the end of the month?

Care homes are not getting the same support as NHS workers? Can agency nurses be prevented from swapping between care homes?

Raab – 9 drive through test sites in operation now

Vallance – international death numbers only compare hospitalisations

Whitty – ONS data includes care home deaths, hospitalisations data does not

Need to protect people wherever they are

Care homes and nursing homes are going to provide some of our biggest challenges

Encourage people NOT to go into care hiomes unless they need to

(ie figures given at press conferences are understated)

Independent has seen letter from Jenny Harries where vulnerable people are not being shielded and supported in the way they should be and what are you going to do?

Whitty – 16m people need to take action to protect themselves and NHS but 1.5m particularly vulnerable who we are keen to have absolute minimum contact possible for longest period of time

2nd wave of letter going out this week

People being added to list from GP information

Some people may have decided to not be completely cut off for several weeks especially eg people with terminal diagnoses

Will there be 100k daily antigen tests by end of month as now confirmed antibody tests won’t be ready? Does this still stand and if it isn’t met will somebody carry the can?

Raab – important we have made the progress we have so far

(ie no answer)

Is promise for 100k daily antigen tests by end of month?

Raab – won’t say anything different to Hancock

We are doing everything we can to increase testing

100k commitment still stands

(Raab basically refused twice to answer the question and then ended the press conference)