

Bad news day.

[Peter Carter](#), former General Secretary and chief executive of the RCN.

On the 11th September 2001 Jo Moore the Labour aide to Transport Minister Stephen Byers sent an email to some of her colleagues saying “*It is now a very good day to get anything out we want to bury*” Readers will recall the events of September 11th.

On the 8th July 2020 a report of an inquiry chaired by Baroness Julia Cumberlege was published it was entitled;

*First Do No Harm
The report of the
independent Medicines
and Medical Devices
Safety Review.*

do know is that it was also the day that the Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak delivered his summer economic plan which dominated the news.

I do not one moment suggest that this was a deliberate ploy to bury bad news but bad news it certainly was.

so no criticism implied there.

This report was commissioned by the then Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Jeremy Hunt.

The review team were tasked to explore three issues.

Despite the distractions of the pandemic I would urge the Government to address the issues raised as a matter of some urgency...

1) **Primodos**, a hormone based medication used between 1958 and 1978 to detect pregnancy.

2) **Sodium Valproate** a drug used to treat epilepsy and bi-polar.

3) **Pelvic mesh**. Its unusual to combine more than one issue with any form of inquiry but Jeremy Hunts decision to do so and to ask Julia Cumberledge to Chair the inquiry was inspired.

Normally a report of this nature would have been headline news and throughout the day would have been the lead item on TV and radio and would have been the lead story in the morning newspapers.

The report did attract publicity but not to the extent that it warranted.

Since the publication I have spoken with a number of senior NHS managers who are not aware of the report.

They have been working 12 hour days coping with the on-going Covid-19 issues,

I have no idea who decided that the 8th July was the day to release this report but what we

It brought together three issues that have been a matter of concern for decades affecting thousands of people, mainly women both directly and indirectly.

The small team were able to move at pace and in two years produced a comprehensive report that similar inquiries have often taken many years and much expense to do so.

adequately recognise that patients are its raison d'être.

It has failed to listen to their concerns and when, belatedly, it has decided to act it has too often moved glacially. Indeed, over two years we have found ourselves in the position of recommending, encouraging and urging the system to take action that should have been taken long ago"

it currently enjoys and the last thing it needs is to be undermined.

However it cannot be denied that thousands of people have suffered terribly over the past 40 years as a result of the failings, the inquiry has revealed.

It was therefore appropriate that the report should be published and that the Government should act with haste to decide the next steps.

I would suggest that a synopsis is made of this report and it becomes part of the curriculum for all those in training in any of the health professions ...

The findings in relation to the three issues have common themes, these can be summarised in a quote from the letter by Baroness Cumberledge to the current Secretary of State Matt Hancock:

'We found that the healthcare system-in which I included the NHS, private providers, the regulators and professional bodies, pharmaceutical and device manufacturers, and policymakers-is disjointed, siloed, unresponsive and defensive. It does not

The report makes painful reading. It is hard hitting, pulls no punches and coming from a former Tory Minister cannot be brushed off as having any bias against the current Government.

Published during the Covid-19 pandemic when the public is holding the NHS in such high regard, presents an interesting conundrum.

The NHS workforce has risen to the challenge of the virus and rightly it deserves all the plaudits

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raised as a matter of some urgency.

Nadine Dorries the Minister responsible for patient safety speaking from the despatch box at the time of the publication of the report stressed that whilst there are multifactorial issues there are two words that are at the heart of the findings, *listening* and *humility*.

And whilst not wishing to single out one

discipline it is poignant that the report states:

Dismissive, defensive attitudes by surgeons are a cultural issue that needs to be addressed by the medical profession, its professional bodies and regulators.

The Royal Colleges of Midwives and Nursing and did not contribute to the inquiry however I would encourage them to be supportive of the recommendations and press for their implementation.

The Government needs to be forewarned that Cumberledge and her team will not be easily sidelined and a failure to move on this will result in significant criticism from within...

Midwives and Nurses are often aware of recurring concerns expressed by patients are well placed to highlight and bring them to the attention of those in authority.

In paragraph 7.6 of the report Baroness Cumberledge puts down a clear indication that the inquiry team will not consider their work to be complete until action has been taken.

It states;

“ On behalf of those affected we cannot stand by and let our recommendations gather dust. We expect the Government to take our thoughts on implementations as seriously as they should our recommendations. If it does we believe we will achieve what is necessary in order to build a ‘system that listens, hears and acts with speed, compassion and proportionality...’

Over its 72 year history the NHS has had countless inquiries with the same themes often recurring.

Recommendations are frequently greeted with enthusiasm and as time passes they fade into the background.

Resistance is often against recommendations that have cost implications and those recommendations that

are introduced are those, which do not.

I would urge the Government to implement these findings.

Primarily it will improve patient care but will also save much time and money spent on further inquiries and financial compensation.

We have much to thank Baroness Cumberledge and her colleagues for.

I would suggest that a synopsis is made of this report and it becomes part of the curriculum for all those in training in any of the health professions.

A failure to do so will only result in other issues arising, resulting in further inquiries, with well-intended sentiments that ultimately will become nothing more than hymns to virtue.

It is highly probable that many in the Government and indeed their own backbenchers might not be too familiar with Baroness Julia Cumberledge.

This is a woman who has given a lifetime of selfless service to country in a wide range of roles.

Her 1986 report on *Neighbourhood nursing* is a seminal piece of work.

In it, among many recommendations was the proposal of Nurse prescribing a revolutionary idea at the time.

Nurse prescribing took years to implement and now in the UK there are 54,000 nurse prescribers.

It was only through the tenacity and perseverance from Baroness Cumberledge that this objective was realised.

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sidelined and a failure to move on this will result in significant criticism from within their own party.

It should also be noted that Jeremy Hunt who commissioned the inquiry Chairs the Health Select committee and he too will not let the Government get away with obfuscation and delay.

I entitled this piece ‘Bad news day’ however the motto ‘Out of darkness cometh light’ is apposite.

If the 9 recommendations are implemented, out of a dark place light will emerge.

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