

World Summit on OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND PUBLIC SAFETY

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Lockdown Britain: changes in working patterns were associated with reduced incidence and severity of some non-COVID illnesses**Miles C Allison***Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, UK*

Statement of the Hypothesis: Large reductions in emergency department attendances and hospitalisations with non-Covid acute illnesses early in the pandemic were attributed to reluctance to seek help and higher referral thresholds. We considered that changes in population behavior and lifestyle may have led to genuine reductions, via social distancing, reduced work intensity and shift working, and less sleep deprivation.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: We compared hospitalisations acute medical illnesses arising from a postcode-defined catchment area of 360,000 over 4 weeks in March – April 2020 with a seasonally-matched 4-week period in 2017. In collaboration with the Office for National Statistics, we obtained data on contemporaneous deaths arising from the same catchment area during the two 4-week blocks, in addition to local atmospheric pollution monitoring data.

Findings: There were 528 patients admitted with non-COVID illness in 2020 vs 924 in 2017 (a fall of 43%). Among those aged under 65, deaths from non-COVID illness were marginally reduced from 49 in 2017 to 46 in 2020. Significant falls in local atmospheric nitrogen dioxide concentrations were seen in the 2020 period compared with 2017.

Conclusions & Significance: The results suggest that reductions in hospitalisations with some non-COVID acute medical illnesses may indeed reflect reduced incidence and severity of non-COVID infections and exacerbations of both cardiac and respiratory disease during lockdown. There is abundant occupational health and pollution literature to support our hypothesis that changes in population and behavior during lockdown brought about unforeseen health benefits. Figure 1 is a proposed network of triggers for some acute medical illnesses.

Biography

Miles Allison is a Consultant Physician with a special interest in gastroenterology. While no longer active in general (internal) medicine he has had a long career being a part of the acute medical intake at a large district hospital. The early phase of the pandemic led to a pause in elective endoscopy, so he had more time to interact with physician colleagues, prompting his idea to investigate admissions and deaths from non-Covid acute medical illnesses. Clinically he continues to try and deliver a holistic approach to his patients, especially when it comes to their lists of medications. He was founding secretary and past president of the Welsh Association for Gastroenterology and Endoscopy (WAGE) and has served several roles on many committees both in Wales and nationally. He has been lead author on national guidelines and was Professional Lead for the establishment of Bowel Screening in Wales.

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