

When health secretary Matt Hancock gave a statement on Covid-19 to the House of Commons on March 16 he was asked by Bob Blackman MP:

The people most seriously at risk are those with underlying conditions. Will the public health agenda being published promote how people can minimise those conditions - for example, by giving up smoking and leading a healthier life - so that we can minimise the number of serious cases that are seen by the NHS?

To which Hancock replied:

That is absolutely right. It is abundantly clear from the research into previous coronaviruses that smoking makes the impact of a coronavirus worse.

Blackman, it should be noted, is chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Smoking and Health. The APPG on Smoking and Health is run by Action on Smoking and Health (ASH).

Was he the source of the question or was it suggested to him by ASH?

Also, given ASH's unhealthy close relationship with the Department of Health (now the Department of Health and Social Care), was Hancock tipped off in advance, giving officials time to prepare a short, sharp message that ASH could repeat **ad nauseam on social media?**

Either way, Hancock's response offered no evidence to support the claim that "It is abundantly clear that smoking makes the impact of a coronavirus worse."

Instead, and not for the first time, MPs and members of the public were simply expected to accept a minister's superior knowledge without questioning it.

Some might call this a '**confidence trick**'. I couldn't possibly comment.

Thanks however to tobacco investment manager Jon Fell we can now shed a little light on Hancock's response.

Replying to a Freedom of Information request that asked, very reasonably, 'Please could you let me know what research Mr Hancock was referring to when he gave this remark', the DHSC has belatedly replied:

The Department does not hold this information.

Hang on, is the DHSC seriously telling us that it doesn't have any evidence to support a comment made in parliament by its own head of department, the Secretary of State for

Health?

If the DHSC doesn't have it, who does? And why can't the DHSC find out? It can't be that difficult:

“Good morning, minister. Do you remember that debate on Covid-19 in March ...?”

“Not really.”

“Well, anyway, you told Bob Blackman ...”

“Who?”

“Bob Blackman. Conservative. One of yours. Runs around with Action on Smoking and Health.”

“And ...?”

“Well, he asked how we might minimise the number of serious cases that are seen by the NHS - by giving up smoking and leading a healthier life, for example - and you replied, “It is abundantly clear that smoking makes the impact of a coronavirus worse.”

“Did I? Well, what of it?”

“Well, minister, we've had an FOI from someone who wants to know where you got your information from?”

“What a stupid question. We all know smoking is bad for you. Of course there's evidence that smoking makes the impact of a coronavirus worse.”

“I'm sorry, sir, the Department doesn't hold that information.”

“Are you sure?”

“Very sure. We've looked.”

“Damn. Well, refer him to Public Health England. It's about time those bastards earned their ridiculous wages.”

You couldn't make it up.

Or perhaps Hancock did make it up, never thinking he might be challenged.

Either way he's been caught out making a statement that his own Department can't support with any evidence.

How bizarre is that?

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The propaganda never stops. False statements, unsubstantiated claims, and a desire to control others culminating in totalitarian overreach. The tobacco control crusade must end.

Saturday, June 6, 2020 at 18:56 | **Vinny Gracchus**
