Abolishing poverty

So how about if we could ‘prescribe’ money? Sarah Blake writes this month in *Life & Times* and offers a potential policy for us to consider: Universal Basic Income (UBI). There is an important intersection here between politics and health. The simple promise of UBI, though it does come in various guises, is an unconditional and non-withdrawable payment for every citizen of a basic right. In May 2021 the Welsh Government announced their desire to run a UBI pilot. COVID-19 has re-kindled interest with the use of furlough payments but it is worth pointing out that UBI is not a new idea. Thomas More made the case in 1516, and Thomas Paine’s essay *Agrarian Justice* (1795) suggested a capital grant as people came of age and a basic income for older people. There was a further surge of interest by a reduction in psychiatric conditions. Financial insecurity and poverty create an all-pervasive chronic psychological stress that is linked to long-term health conditions including cardiovascular disease, upper respiratory tract infections, and depression.3 GPs are too often submerged, even drowning, in the downstream consequences of poverty. UBI is an upstream intervention that may, in the long-term, have a transformative effect on health as well as a host of other areas, not least unpaid care work and education. There are complexities with UBIs, and pilots are needed to establish what works and what doesn’t, but is giving cash to people really that radical? The universality of UBI strips away the stigma of benefit systems and the emerging evidence suggests very real health gains.

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