The source of the idea that lockdown compliance could not be long maintained remains unknown, but apparently it was not SAGE or its behavioural science advisers. The shambles of delay was repeated all over again in September and October of 2020, yet on this occasion the excuse that we had no experience of how to combat the pandemic could not apply. The consequence of these delays has been many thousands of avoidable deaths, amounting to the most deadly failure of government in our lifetimes.

Farrar discusses other events of the pandemic, including the obfuscation of China as news of the virus emerged, the early stages of vaccine development, trials of potential therapeutic agents, and the development of new variants.

The book is one of the first to analyse the failures of our response to the pandemic and seek lessons for the future, the assistance of Anjana Ahuja being evident in the readable and engaging text. A public inquiry has been promised, but Farrar says it is a disgrace that it will not start until 2022.

The experience of the frontline of intensive care units, hospital wards, and disrupted primary care are not included; this is the story of central decision making. Other publications will eventually record care in hospitals, care homes, and communities, but, for insight into the UK’s response and where it went wrong, Farrar’s account is both timely and authoritative.

Two impressions stand out. The first is of a prime minister at the helm of a government lacking the technical expertise to challenge poor science casting around for options other than indicated by science, for example, herd immunity or the Great Barrington Declaration.

The second is that future pandemics are inevitable. Disease outbreaks in recent years include HIV, MERS, SARS, Ebola, and others, and we have no choice other than to learn every possible lesson from COVID-19 in order to prepare for the next new virus.

Richard Baker, Retired GP and Professor Emeritus at the University of Leicester.

Email: rb14@leicester.ac.uk

This article was first posted on BJGP Life on 6 August 2021; https://bjgp-life.com/spike

DOI: https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp21X712781

REFERENCES