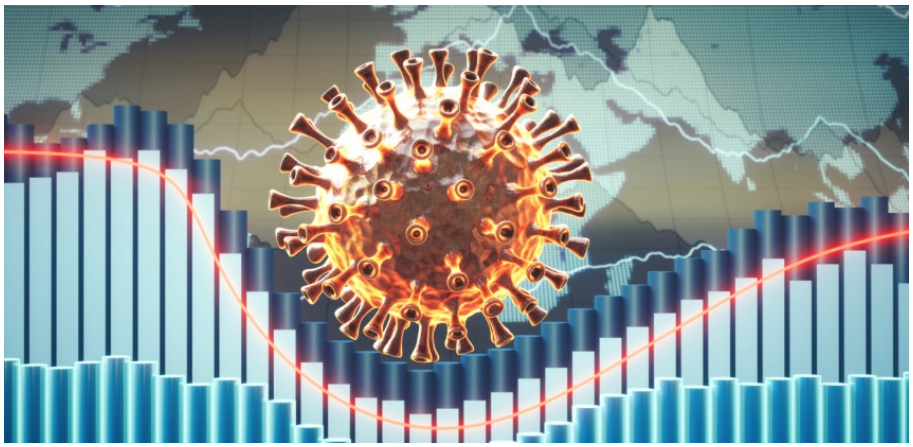
FRAUDULENT MODELS – FATAL CONSEQUENCES



It was the model that shocked the world.

In mid-March, British researchers issued an alarming study that predicted 2.2 million Americans would die of COVID-19 by August without immediate, draconian measures to halt its spread.

As the virus rampaged across the country, more than 80 percent of Americans would be infected, the experts warned, causing massive shortages of hospital beds and intensive care units. Death and misery would be the new norm for months to come.

Dr. Neil Ferguson, an epidemiologist at the London-based Imperial College who led the team, made “social distancing” a household term.

“A combination of case isolation, social distancing of the entire population and either household quarantine or school and university closure are required,” Ferguson wrote. “All four interventions combined are predicted to have the largest effect on transmission.”

Ferguson’s work terrified policymakers, the news media, and general public. Dr. Deborah Birx referenced the model during a March 16 press briefing at the White House.

“Sweeping new federal recommendations announced on Monday for Americans to sharply limit their activities appeared to draw on a dire scientific report warning that, without action by the government and individuals to slow the spread of coronavirus and suppress new cases, 2.2 million people in the United States could die,” the *New York Times* reported March 16.

Ferguson strayed from the role of objective scientist to global policy advisor, insisting his harsh rules should continue for at least 18 months until a vaccine was found. “It’s a difficult position for the world to be in,” he opined after his paper’s release.

Acting on Ferguson's doomsday predictions, the Centers for Disease Control issued strict guidance that prompted state officials to close schools; shutter "nonessential" businesses; and issue stay-at-home orders. They simply were acting on the best available science and data, governors claimed, as they ordered their constituents to live under a form of house arrest for weeks on end.

Crude Mathematical Guesswork

But Ferguson's study *wasn't* science—or anything close to it.

Like so many scientific "models," the purpose of Ferguson's work was to influence policy decisions instead of providing a forecast of future events based on solid data.

Ferguson's computer model code is a "buggy mess that looks more like a bowl of angel hair pasta than a finely tuned piece of programming," experts told the London Telegraph on Saturday (5/16). "It's totally unreliable."

A few weeks after issuing his first set of charts, Ferguson drastically reduced the projected body count without explanation.

Now, as the consequences of Ferguson's untested prescription to mitigate COVID-19 are coming into stark relief, including historic rates of unemployment and other unforeseen tragedies, his work is facing broad condemnation.

One software engineer, in a thorough analysis of Ferguson's methods, said that "all papers based on this code should be retracted immediately. Imperial's modelling efforts should be reset with a new team that isn't under Professor Ferguson."

A weekend column in *The Telegraph* concluded that Ferguson's coronavirus models "could go down in history as the most devastating software mistake of all time, in terms of economic costs and lives lost."

Matt Ridley, author of numerous award-winning scientific books, posed this blunt question: "Did we base one of the biggest peacetime policy decisions on crude mathematical guesswork?"

The answer, unfortunately, is yes.

But it's too late to extract any accountability from Dr. Neil Ferguson. In what now looks like a convenient excuse, Ferguson stepped down from his government advisory post earlier this month for breaking his own social distancing policy by having an affair with a married woman. His

resignation came just as criticism of his study intensified both here and in the U.K.

Now there is no way to question Ferguson publicly let alone censure him for his reckless work.

Murray's Defective Model

Ferguson's model, however, isn't the only fraudulent model that led to destructive policy decisions. Citing the Imperial College model, Dr. Christopher Murray, director of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation in Seattle, produced another set of graphs at the end of March that expanded on Ferguson's pseudoscientific "social distancing" demands.

Much like Ferguson, Murray portrayed plague-like conditions in the United States once COVID-19 took hold.

"In addition to a large number of deaths from COVID-19, the epidemic will place a load on health system resources well beyond the current capacity of hospitals in the USA…especially for ICU care and ventilator use," Murray warned. "The estimated excess demand on hospital systems is predicated on the enactment of social distancing measures within three weeks in all locations that have not done so already and maintenance of these measures throughout the epidemic."

Birx and Dr. Anthony Fauci, without subjecting the raw paper to any peer review, presented Murray's charts to President Trump at the end of March. According to the president, they then insisted he "shut everything down." The CDC guidance, first implemented for 15 days, was extended to April 30. (Murray's model has been updated 16 times since its March 26 release.)

Subsequently, the world's most robust economy has crashed, 36 million Americans (and counting) have applied for unemployment, critical health care services have been delayed, kids will be out of school for at least five months, and economists are predicting a double-digit drop in economic growth for at least the next quarter—yet none of Murray's most outlandish projections, including hospital bed and ventilator shortages, materialized.

Further, while Murray and his boosters made all sorts of noise about closing grade schools and staying six feet apart at the grocery store, they overlooked one critical vector for the disease: *nursing homes*.

It is increasingly likely that by the time all the data is collected and verified, at least half the total number of coronavirus-related fatalities will be tied to nursing homes and long-term care facilities. In some states, roughly three-quarters of all COVID-19 deaths have been nursing home residents.

The question of how to protect the most fragile and helpless from contracting coronavirus not only

was ignored by the researchers at IHME, it also was of no concern to big-state governors including New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and California Governor Gavin Newsom.

They, along with others, instituted policies that mixed infected nursing home residents with uninfected residents and workers. “The result has been a raging wildfire of infection and death,” one university professor of ethics wrote in the *Times* on Sunday. Some Congressional Republicans want investigations into the deadly decisions.

So, as modelers and governors warned about the dangers of healthy beach-goers, tens of thousands of vulnerable seniors succumbed to COVID-19.

Ironically, because of the large numbers of nursing home fatalities, Murray’s overall death count might be right despite his glaring omission. He will take credit for accuracy even though he never factored in nursing home residents or bothered to offer strategies to protect them.

The White House still has time to rectify its reliance on these fraudulent models. The president could begin by acknowledging both the Ferguson and Murray studies were highly flawed documents that fueled unnecessary fear. If he is serious about opening up the country as quickly as possible, President Trump needs to acknowledge the mistake.

Tear up the ever-changing CDC guidance, protect the most vulnerable, prepare our healthcare system, and get Americans back to work and back to normal. These models, and the decisions based on them, should not inflict any more damage.

Julie Kelly is happily married in Orland Park, Illinois. She calls herself “an accidental activist.”

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