



Under The Radar

*A dive into the news
you might have missed*



TRAFALGAR STRATEGY

Taking the pain (killers) away

What happened?

In a major change of policy, the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has advised doctors to prescribe those who suffer from chronic primary pain physical and psychological therapies rather than painkillers. Recommended interventions include exercise programmes, cognitive behavioural therapy, and even acupuncture.

NICE's new guidelines state that there is "little or no evidence" that painkillers make any difference to the person's quality of life. Meanwhile, commonly-used medications such as paracetamol, benzodiazepines or opioids pose additional risks, such as addiction.

What does it mean?

Meditation, acupuncture, yoga: treatments once dismissed as New Age pseudo-scientific drivel are now being put forward as legitimate – and perhaps even better – alternatives to medication for pain management.

In the past few decades, we have developed a much greater appreciation of the relationship between mind and body. The medieval Christian claim that dualism is a heresy might not have been so far off the mark after all. More proof of this interdependence came out in a study published earlier this week, in

which researchers discovered that one in three survivors of severe Covid have been diagnosed with mental health conditions.

In a time and cash-strapped health service, it's tempting to turn to 'quick-fix' solutions, but an ideal healthcare system should incorporate a comprehensive focus on both physical and psychological well-being, even if that requires more attention and long-term planning.

NICE's policy change challenges the NHS to provide personalised care that appreciates the serious psychological distress associated with a lack of diagnosis or clear prognosis, and that prioritises critical long-term lifestyle changes over ineffective 'quick-fixes'. With an estimated 700,000 long-Covid sufferers in the UK with no clear prospect of recovery, this challenge is more important than ever.

But this does not mean we should throw our pills out quite yet. The vaccine roll-out may have hit a snag this week but overall it has been a great illustration of the wonder of modern medicine. In a rare moment, Big Pharma is feeling love from the British press and public as we watch the COVID death-rate plummet.

NICE's recommended interventions ought to work alongside, rather than replace existing medications. For the hundreds of thousands of people across the UK with chronic primary pain (i.e. pain with no known cause), painkillers are a crucial mobility aid. Many are rightly concerned about the risk that they might no longer have access to them.

Cancel (& Annul) Culture

What happened?

An investigation by *The Times* discovered that the monarchy has stripped honours from a record seventy people over the last decade. Recipients' honours are being "cancelled & annulled" at an increasing rate, with nine people having honours revoked last year, including sex offender Harvey Weinstein. This was the third-highest annual figure in the post-war period.

The biggest category of disgrace is child sex offences, which accounts for 37% of cancellations in the past twenty years, with fraud the second largest at 21%. And while the Cabinet Office gives reasons for why individuals receive honours, it officially refuses to explain why they are taken away – although it is usually obvious for high profile figures who are disgraced in public.

What does it mean?

Although a celebrity, businessman or politician's fall from grace is a public spectacle, the Queen has opted to quietly remove honours, contrary to the fanfare which comes with bestowing one. While it may all seem very British to limit such fuss, *The Times* investigation raises questions over the honours process, which is "shrouded in secrecy" and "values dignity over transparency."

Unsurprisingly, the commentariat isn't wailing about the Palace surrendering to "cancel culture", despite Sir Bernard Jenkin MP arguing that it's time for the removal of honours to be decided by an independent committee, who could review evidence without being influenced by "the mob". After all, when 37% of cancellations relating to child sex offences, it's hard to argue this is cancel culture rather than just the obvious and decent thing to do.

But this begs the question, why are the disgraced granted a quiet removal? When an honour is bestowed, Royal announcements are made, ceremonies of grandeur are held, and the entire circus is covered by the media. A "cancel & annul" ceremony may sound crass, but shouldn't perpetrators of heinous crimes be publicly shamed for losing their honour? While public figures are unlikely to escape a trial by media, secret paedophiles honoured by the Queen receive more media attention for their achievements than their terrible crimes.

Yet while we debate the honours stripping process, more potential honourees are actually rejecting them, with 443 people saying no to a knighthood, MBE or OBE since 2011. With growing conversations about Britain's imperial past, there is obvious discomfort with receiving an award tied to Empire.

Clearly, this is a process in desperate need of a shakeup, both to be made more transparent and more in tune with modern Britain.

McConnell's Chutzpah Baiting

What happened?

On Monday, Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell told chief executives critical of voting restrictions to “stay out of politics” and to not “pick sides in these big fights”.

McConnell also issued a written statement on Georgia's new voting law, arguing that it has been misrepresented as part of “a coordinated campaign by powerful and wealthy people to mislead and bully the American people”. His remarks have been heavily criticised by Democrats, who have accused him of extreme hypocrisy in light of his history of defending and promoting corporate America.

What does it mean?

Republicans have long been the party of big business. Few Americans would have been as happy as McConnell in 2010, when the Supreme Court's Citizens United ruling reversed century-old campaign finance restrictions and gave the green light to unlimited election spending by big corporations.

The ruling entrenched the dividing lines in American politics when it came to big business. Democrats have campaigned hard for the decision to be overturned ever since (despite many of their politicians hardly being shy of taking

some corporate cash), whilst Republicans have revelled in the pockets of huge corporations.

But in a populist twist borrowed from the Trump playbook, Republicans are now publicly opposing Corporate America's hold over Washington. Ideologically, McConnell is certainly still one of the Senate's biggest proponents of Citizens United and the freedoms it has afforded big corporations. But McConnell can see which way the wind is blowing on voting rights. His unparalleled political foresight is what has led him to become one of the most successful Republicans of the last century.

McConnell is a master tactician – he will know that a debate on Georgia's new voting law, and by extension voting rights across the nation, is one Republicans will struggle to convincingly win the argument on. The American public is simply not on their side. But, renewed liberal fury over McConnell's chutzpah moves the discourse back into friendlier, more familiar territory for the GOP.

Attacking the person, not the idea, has too often become the preferred form of attack for liberals. It's arguably what let Donald Trump into the White House in 2016. Joe Biden's ability to instead frame his campaign around sensible ideas and common values was key to his remarkable victory, and his refusal to fall into the GOP's culture war traps since he's taken office has paved the way for what are strong approval ratings in the age of extreme polarisation. Democrats should continue to follow his lead, not McConnell's chutzpah baiting.

This Weeks Must Reads

Pit my truth against your truth and it's a terrifying
race to the bottom

[The Times](#)

“When ‘lived experience’ trumps evidence, the debate can only be vapid, vicious — and very personal”

- Matthew Syed explains how truth became victim of our age.

Among the Covid sceptics: ‘We are being
manipulated, without a shadow of a doubt’

[The Guardian](#)

“Like apocalyptic cults that immediately say they had simply misinterpreted a prophecy when the world fails to end, there are at least some strains of Covid scepticism where views remain the unchanged, no matter what occurs”

- Samira Shackle on COVID scepticism.

Northern Ireland backlash to Brexit fudge
threatens the Union

[The Telegraph](#)

“Britain faces two devastating scenarios: either the Union becomes the price of Brexit, or Brexit becomes the price of the Union.”

- Sherelle Jacobs on the riots in Northern Ireland.

Brazil's coronavirus nightmare:
‘Bolsonaro is more isolated than ever’

[Financial Times](#)

“With infections soaring and the economy weakening again, the president is struggling to keep his government together”

- Michael Stott, Michael Pooler and Bryan Harris on Bolsonaro's pandemic response.



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