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MEDICINES, SAFETY AND SCANDALS.

Adam Brimelow reports for the BBC that Dame Sally Davies, the Chief Medical Officer, has called for medicines review to restore public trust. She has told the Academy of Medical Sciences she was very concerned" about a view that doctors and scientists are "untrustworthy". This follows a campaign by the BMJ to get drug companies to reveal more data about drug trials ... including the ones that haven't shown their new products in a good light.

This all needs to be done ... but 'doctors and scientists' are just part of the picture. Shouldn't this 'review' include politicians?

One of the drugs on Dame Sally's hit list is Tamiflu, the costly drug stockpiled by the last Labour government, which seems to do those with a commercial interest MUCH more good than it ever did for the patients to whom it was given. Perhaps we should look at the way certain politicians and others with vested interests, at home and abroad, handled the threatened flu pandemics ... and the gains they made as a result. Let's dig for the dirt.

Back in November 2005 F William Engdahl wrote a piece for the Asia Times. "The world population is being whipped into a fear frenzy by irresponsible public health officials from the US administration to the World Health Organization (WHO) to the United States Centers for Disease Control. They all warn about the imminent danger that the bird flu virus might mutate into a malicious strain that is transmissible between humans, contaminating the human species in pandemic proportions. Often the flu pandemic of 1918, which is said to have killed 18 million worldwide, is cited as an example of what "might" lie in store for us."

In 2009, Owendebanks wrote in the Daily Kos: "Despite the admission of absence of a clear and present danger to the American public, the President called on Congress to immediately pass a new \$7.1 billion in emergency funding to prepare for that not-imminent, not-pandemic, possible-in-the-future danger. The speech was an exercise in the Administration's now-famous 'pre-emptive war,' this one against Avian Flu. As with the other pre-emptive wars, there is a multiple agenda – one might say, killing two birds with one stone, were it not so tasteless.

Prominent among the President's list of emergency measures was a call for Congress to appropriate another \$1 billion explicitly for Tamiflu. The real point of interest is the company in California who developed Tamiflu, Gilead Sciences, listed on the NASDAQ as (GILD). US Secretary of Defense (sic), Donald H. Rumsfeld, was Chairman of the Board of Gilead Sciences from 1997 until early 2001 when he became Defense Secretary.

A as-yet-unconfirmed report is that Rumsfeld recently purchased additional stock in his former company, Gilead Sciences, worth \$18 million, making him one of its largest if not the largest stock owners today. Whether that is true or not, when the Bird Flu scare was just heating up, according to a report in a November 2005 issue of Fortune magazine, the Defense Secretary decided not to sell his many shares in Gilead so as to 'avoid being accused of insider trading.' If true, that meant Mr. Rumsfeld, apparently not one to shy away from turning a fast buck, had bagged an eye-popping windfall, as demand for Tamiflu worldwide exploded. On October of the same year the Pentagon announced it had stockpiled quantities of Tamiflu for members of the military.

Since early 2001 when Rumsfeld left the board of Gilead Sciences to become Defense Secretary, Gilead's stock price has gone from around \$7 per share to just a hair above \$50 a share in 2005

From \$7 to \$50 translated into a neat 720% profit for Mr. Rumsfeld's Gilead stock holdings since he went to Washington in 2001 and up until 2005. Since the start of the carefully orchestrated current Bird Flu hysteria in March of 2005, Rummy's Gilead stocks have gained a neat 56% alone. That might explain why, instead of dumping his shares as one might expect from an honest government official wanting to avoid a conflict of interest, he instead opted to buy another \$18 million worth."

Owendebanks said: "I remain a huge skeptic (sic) on this latest round of flu reports" and went on to report: "The reliable Washington friend, Britain's Tony Blair, ordered the UK Government to buy enough Tamiflu drugs to supply 25% of the 56 million British citizens. Mr Blair seemed always ready to help his friends in Washington whether backing Washington's war against WMD in Iraq or Tamiflu."

Blair's business interests and the wealth he has accrued have been the subject of a great deal of media interest – but his cronies didn't do so badly either. F William Engdahl (again) reports: "Paul Drayson, is also a donor and has also been given a peerage by Blair in highly controversial circumstances that led to accusations that Blair was "compromising the peerage system". The controversy began when Drayson, previously an admirer of Mrs Thatcher, made a substantial donation to Labour while the Ministry of Defence was deciding who should be awarded a smallpox vaccine contract. Drayson gave a further donation of half a million pounds to Labour just six weeks after the PM made him Lord Drayson.

Controversially, the Blair government – in what has been called a "cash-for-contracts" scandal - awarded Drayson's company, PowderJect, the smallpox vaccine contract without any competition. The contract was worth GBP32million and Drayson is thought to have made around GBP20m for PowderJect from this deal. It later emerged that Drayson had been in a group of businessmen who had breakfasted with the Prime Minister in Downing Street at about the time Ministry of Defence (MoD) experts were meeting to decide what type of smallpox vaccine to buy. When the vaccine deal came to be finalised, officials discovered that Drayson had already made an exclusive deal with the manufacturer of the Lister smallpox vaccine, thus cornering the market in the vaccine the MoD had decided to buy."

Returning to the flu scares of recent years, a website called Serendipity has compiled a list of relevant articles. It contains statements such as: "Not long ago, President Bush sought to instil panic in this country by telling us a minimum of 200,000 people will die from the avian flu pandemic, but it could be as bad as 2 million deaths in this country alone. This hoax is then used to justify the immediate purchase of 80 million doses of Tamiflu, a worthless drug that in no way shape or form treats the avian flu, but only decreases the amount of days one is sick and can actually contribute to the virus having more lethal mutations. So the U.S. placed an order for 20 million doses of this worthless drug at a price of \$100 per dose. That comes to a staggering \$2 billion."

Tom Rawstone conducted a Special Investigation for The Mail Online back in 2010. The headline was: "The men who made a killing out of swine flu while we wasted £1bn and were exposed to harmful drugs." It's worth a read. He reminds us that "the Doomsday scenario predicted never unfolded." He started his article by giving an example of the side

effects experienced by those who were given the drug and went on to say: “Whether Britain was, in fact, any worse hit than elsewhere is unclear. Research suggests that as many as eight out of ten people diagnosed as suffering from swine flu by the hotline did not have it. That means that more than 800,000 of the one million-plus packets of Tamiflu – which cost around £15 each – were given out needlessly.

Rawstone quotes Labour MP Paul Flynn: “The main concern is that the drugs companies and the vaccine manufacturers have their tentacles in every area where decisions are taken – that includes the WHO, governments, civil service, and even charities. The overwhelming view now,' says Flynn, 'is that the scare was grossly exaggerated.' In all, it is estimated that the companies behind the vaccines and anti-virals will scoop a £4 billion windfall from the pandemic.”

I'm not making excuses for doctors and scientists – of course our conduct should be scrutinised. All I am saying is that healthcare is sick and we need a holistic approach to the problem. We are just one piece of the jigsaw – so Dame Sally needs to look at the wider picture.

See http://www.serendipity.li/bf/swine_flu.htmor or Google 'Rawstone The men who made a killing out of swine flu' for more details.

Dr John Cormack