

The Royal Statistical Society COVID-19 Taskforce

“The past few weeks has seen an unstoppable epidemic ... of statistics. The flood threatens to overwhelm us all, but what do all these numbers mean?”

(Spiegelhalter and Richardson, 2020)

RSS president elect, Sylvia Richardson, and David Spiegelhalter, have announced a new RSS Taskforce on COVID-19-19, which they will co-chair. The group's remit is

- To support the production of evidence-based analyses
- To emphasise the importance of fundamental statistical principles and best statistical practice in relation to the analysis of observational data
- To contribute to the design of future data collection
- To engage in increasing public understanding of the statistical issues linked to COVID-19-19.

The aims of Radical Statistics align closely with this remit. We shall be sending lucky Taskforce members a *gratis copy* of this special issue of Radical Statistics. (Unlucky members will receive two!) We invite readers of Radical Statistics to submit evidence to the Taskforce, and to answer their short survey which is at *www.rss.org.uk*

The Taskforce has already submitted evidence to the Medicines & Healthcare products Regulatory Authority (MHRA) regarding the specification criteria that MHRA had set for antibody tests. These criteria include that error rates should be less than 2%. As the Taskforce points out “antibody tests which meet lesser criteria ... can still be acceptable for use in the context of a powerful suite of population surveillance studies, because estimates can be corrected for the marketed surveillance test’s” referring to work by Diggle and others.

The Taskforce also urge that “too much pessimism should not be engendered by recent evidence regarding a lack of persistent antibodies following mild disease. and stress the “need for well-designed studies to bring forth clear UK evidence on this important topic”.

The Taskforce have already written for the Guardian (Spiegelhalter and Richardson 2020),and for the radio programme “More or Less”.

We wish them well in their work.

Spiegelhalter, David, and Sylvia Richardson. 2020. “Coronavirus Statistics: What Can We Trust and What Should We Ignore?” The Guardian, April 12, 2020. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/12/coronavirus-statistics-what-can-we-trust-and-what-should-we-ignore>.