

Foreword by the President of the IFoA



It gives me great pleasure to introduce this issue of the profession's *Longevity Bulletin*, a publication that has been running for almost ten years now, helping 'longevity stakeholders' – not just actuaries – achieve a better understanding of the drivers behind mortality, morbidity and longevity.

While we like to think we understand a great deal about these subjects, the current pandemic has made us realise how much remains uncertain, unknowable, uncontrollable.

In my presidential address, I spoke about the importance of judgement and the embracing of diversity, experimentation and adaptation. Their importance have been underscored by the Covid-19 crisis. For some time, they have underpinned much of the work involved in the twin fields of pharmacological discovery and epidemiological research considered in this edition of the *Longevity Bulletin*. Experimentation speaks for itself in these fields, but adaptation has long been an important part of pharmacology, with many medicines being examples of 'repurposing' – finding a novel application for an existing and well-tested drug.

Diversity has also been seen in this crisis, with governments and organisations realising they needed many different skills, resources and approaches to cope well – and more fundamentally, different mindsets.

Finally, judgement. The crisis has brought out the importance of applying sound judgement quickly when data is incomplete, and the problem too complex to fully model and quantify – as has often been the case with many common conditions that pharmacologists and epidemiologists have grappled with.

Although the content of this issue predates the Covid-19 emergency, it remains an important and fascinating selection of topics covering both recent 'negatives' (the opioid crisis), well-known success stories (metformin for diabetics), and one area of growing concern – the problem of polypharmacy, or too many drugs. In one sense the pandemic puts these into perspective; in another, it makes us realise that chronic problems may end up more serious than temporary crises if they are allowed to grow unchecked, and their complexity not appreciated.

I hope all readers find this edition of the *Longevity Bulletin* useful and that it shows how we in the actuarial profession can apply our judgement and analysis in the unfolding catastrophe, trying to navigate through the uncertainty, in ways that serve the public interest – which is, of course, our *raison d'être*.

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