

Illth, wealth and GDP

<https://www.taxresearch.org.uk/Blog/2026/01/08/illth-wealth-and-gdp/>

Published: January 12, 2026, 8:31 pm

The Guardian [has reported this morning](#) that:

Higher consumption of some food preservatives is associated with an increased risk of type 2 diabetes and cancer, two studies suggest.

*The findings, published in the medical journals *Nature Communications* and the *BMJ*, may have important public health implications given the ubiquitous use of these additives globally, researchers said.*

While more studies are needed, they said the findings should lead to a re-evaluation of regulations governing the use of preservatives by companies in products such as ultra-processed foods (UPF) to improve consumer protection worldwide.

This comes after [another recent paper shows](#):

High ultra-processed food intake is associated with altered brain perfusion, depressive symptomatology, and increased inflammatory profile.

The evidence that the consumption of ultraprocessed foods is dangerous to human health is becoming overwhelming, and yet no real action is being taken. The call is always for 'more research', the whole point of which is to defer action while keeping the researchers in their labs, beavering away on activity to which they already know the answers.

I recorded a podcast yesterday with the *BMJ* (the British Medical Journal), in which I was interviewed by its editor. We started on the subject of doctor pay and the justification for an increase, but went on to much broader issues, many of which I was warned would probably never make the cut, ending instead in the bin of unused recordings. I mention this because, at the conclusion of the recording, I was asked how I would approach the UK health crisis, and in response, I made two key points.

First, I said I would not focus on the microeconomics of health care, which politicians

are obsessed with. So, I would not focus on appointment availability, waiting times, or organisational structures, because ultimately the issues with all of these are known as they are caused by a growth in demand for health care services, which is the real issue for concern.

Second, therefore, I would want to focus on what I called the macro issues within health care, which explain why that explosion in health care demand has taken place. I would, in other words, seek, on the basis of existing knowledge (because it exists), explanations for:

- * The growth in chronic disease management, which is overwhelming the NHS, to determine for whose benefit and with what real outcomes this is occurring, when we all know much of it exists to facilitate profit-making by big pharmaceutical companies as a result of their revenue-gouging the public purse for their own benefit and not that of the patient.
- * The growth in demand for such chronic, ongoing care, which is known to be due to the excess consumption of ultra-processed foods, which is similarly known to be toxic and profoundly harmful.
- * The failure to control the excessive consumption of alcohol, which is a major carcinogen.
- * The use of mental health services to label many people in society as "divergent" when there is nothing unusual about their way of thinking, except for the fact that neoliberal capitalism does not like the challenge that they often pose to its methods of working, and ultimately to its right to extract profit from people's labour.

I could have added more issues to the list, but my point was very clear. It was that unless we tackle the causes of ill health, most of which have been manufactured by a toxic form of organisation of our society that has been designed to extract profit from people at the cost of their wellbeing, then nothing will solve the problems of the NHS as people become progressively sicker.

My focus was, then, not on micro issues because what I was interested in were the causes of illth, rather than the generation of supposed wealth in the form of GDP, which did not reflect wellbeing, in the context of which I quoted the words of the late Robert Kennedy on the failings of GDP as a measure.

I hope that part of the recording makes the cut. It is a message those in charge of health policy need to hear.

Taking further action

If you want to write a letter to your MP on the issues raised in this blog post, there is a ChatGPT prompt to assist you in doing so, with full instructions, [**here**](#).

**One word of warning, though: please ensure you have the correct MP.
ChatGPT can get it wrong.**

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