Twitter Thread by Geoffrey York

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South African science was crucial in helping UK discover its new variants; but then the UK govt claimed (wrongly) that the SA variant is more transmissible. No evidence to support this, according to @krisp_news

From the Times article: SA scientists "were the first to recognize the importance of a genetic change in the spike protein, something that allows the virus to attach more easily to human cells, making it more infectious than the original version."

The SA discovery was shared on Dec 4 over the WHO's Covid-19 Evolution Working Group. "Our British colleagues were able to go back to their own databases and interrogate them as a result of the work we shared," Richard Lessells, an infectious diseases specialist at Krisp, said.

More from the Times article by @janeflan: "While working on a much smaller budget than their British colleagues, the South African team, experienced with work on HIV, have the skills to decode the genome of viruses."

"They started work on samples of the Covid-19 virus soon after the first cases reached South Africa in March. In October they identified the first example that had changed significantly."

"While genetic mutation is standard for viruses, what was striking about the evolution of Covid-19 was that it evolved more than normal. Even more important, the changes almost all involved the spike protein, improving the virus's ability to attach to human cells."

The UK health secretary's claim that the South African mutation was more transmissible than the British version, referred to as B117, surprised Dr Lessells and his colleagues. "We have not found any evidence to support that," he said.

My colleague @pwaldieGLOBE has found further evidence to cast doubt on the UK government's claim. "Jonathan Ball, a professor of molecular virology at the University of Nottingham, said it wasn't clear that the South African variant was more contagious than the Kent variant."

From his article: "Britain and South Africa have been world leaders in sequencing the virus's genome to keep track of the genetic changes."

“In other countries that do not have this capacity, it is quite possible that these variants are already in circulation but currently unidentified," said Andrew Preston, a researcher in microbial pathogenesis at the University of Bath.

"It appears we are entering a particularly dangerous phase of this pandemic, making the effective rollout of the vaccines even more time-critical," Prof. Preston said.

Source for the quotes from Prof. Preston and Prof. Ball:
https://t.co/YraMFvP0JU
(for subscribers)