

Democratic Fatigue: information overload

So, few people seem interested in electing a Police Commissioner. Soon after, the media parade for us politicians, academics and pundits – all expressing perplexity or concern. One recurring salvaging explanation is that citizens do not have enough information to make a choice.

As one of these unengaged citizens, I do not share these puzzlements, concerns or notions. My mind and life are overwhelmed by choices and information, and I cannot cope with more. There is a great difference between wanting to have an individual voice and access to dialogue, and submitting to governmentally initiated and designed choice of other people's packages. I may want the many authorities in my life to listen, but I do not want, necessarily, the responsibility of having to vet or choose who all those authorities might be. Evolved democracy is very different from democracy by government prescription.

There are interesting parallels here to our current healthcare commissioning. As a senior GP I know most of my peers have little enthusiasm for their freshly bestowed mantle of authority: Clinical Commissioning Groups. Yes, we want managers to listen, but we do not want to have to do their job. Putatively democratised devices to commission Welfare Services appeal to certain kinds of politicians, academics and tank-thinkers. But those with long experience on the frontline usually have much less confidence or enthusiasm for these demotic initiatives. The nature and delivery of our complex human activities are often very protean. Such formulaic systems of presentation and packaging, however well-intentioned, will serve them poorly.

Solutions? There are none. We can offer only our wisest compromises. In the past, I think we understood this better.

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