

A whole lot of fuss about the wrong things?

I am one of the first to say; “why is snow such a big news story in the UK?”. In countries with a lot more snow than the UK, such as Canada and Sweden, it is not news because they are well equipped to deal with it. I find it fascinating that snow seems to dominate our news every time even the smallest flake falls. Why are news teams sending their correspondents out to stand in freezing conditions to tell us it’s snowing? Yes, some areas do experience worse snowfall than others, and it may be interesting to see, but the national newspapers sometimes focus on the wrong weather-related issues. The news stories which create unnecessary hysteria leading to behaviour such as panic buying resulting in shortages of food and milk supplies frustrate me. We know that snow can disrupt our daily routines but this is usually short lived. It is rarely a legitimate cause to plan for a sustained period of hibernation. Did all the people rushing to stock up fail to notice the endless early weather warnings that snow was on its way? Was a lot of food wasted following this extreme kitchen cupboard filling? What about the people who ran out of supplies and needed them only to find the shop shelves were empty because some had enough food to feed an army? It is common sense that if major roads are affected by snow, food deliveries would also take a hit, but this not often an issue for days on end. Is this over-reaction being drummed up by the constant focus on the snow and scaremongering by the media?

In contrast to this, we know that cold weather, particularly when sustained over a long period of time, can contribute to an increase in ill-health and impact on safety and wellbeing. Snow causes dangerous driving conditions and major disruption to public transport, playing havoc with many vital services, including health services. If staff are unable to get to work there could be a shortage of health workers at hospitals or GP surgeries. This could impact on support provided to patients and result in the cancellation of appointments and operations. Poor road conditions generally lead to an increase in accidents, putting yet more pressure on health services and the wellbeing of all road users. We should also remember those people living alone who may not be able to get the help and support they need. As if snow wasn’t enough, it also comes with ice. Should the weather be too unpleasant to venture out, or pavements or roads too dangerous, for even a simple walk or jog, people are likely to stay indoors. This comes with its own issues including the cost of heating homes and access to food and supplies. These are the sorts of stories the news teams should be focussing on.

People in the UK are very good at coming together in times of crisis. There are always stories of people being labelled as “heroes” with the resolve to find solutions amongst all the noise of otherwise silent snow. It was heartening during the recent “Beast from the East” snow episode to hear the stories of local people helping NHS and other health and social care staff

to get to work. Footage emerged of volunteers with 4x4 cars transporting staff to their required destinations and delivering supplies to those otherwise cut off by the snow. These efforts to work out what can be done to limit disruption and keep people safe are the quite rightly big news stories. .

The consequences of snow discussed here are all are important to our health and wellbeing. If we were better equipped to handle adverse weather conditions the impact could be reduced. Each time we experience significant snowfall we are given an opportunity to learn from the past and identify ways to cope with the seemingly unavoidable disruption it causes. As we know, it doesn't snow in the UK very often and so it may not be an emergency planning priority. It could be argued that an investment in time, resources and money for "snow management" is unnecessary compared with other local priorities. Taking all these points into consideration; let's just be sensible and try to remember that generally, we do our best in difficult circumstances. It would be great if we could stop the noise and drama in the news, particularly where there is nothing tangible to report other than the weather itself. Snow doesn't last for long and it will be back, one day; ready for the news correspondents to flock once again.