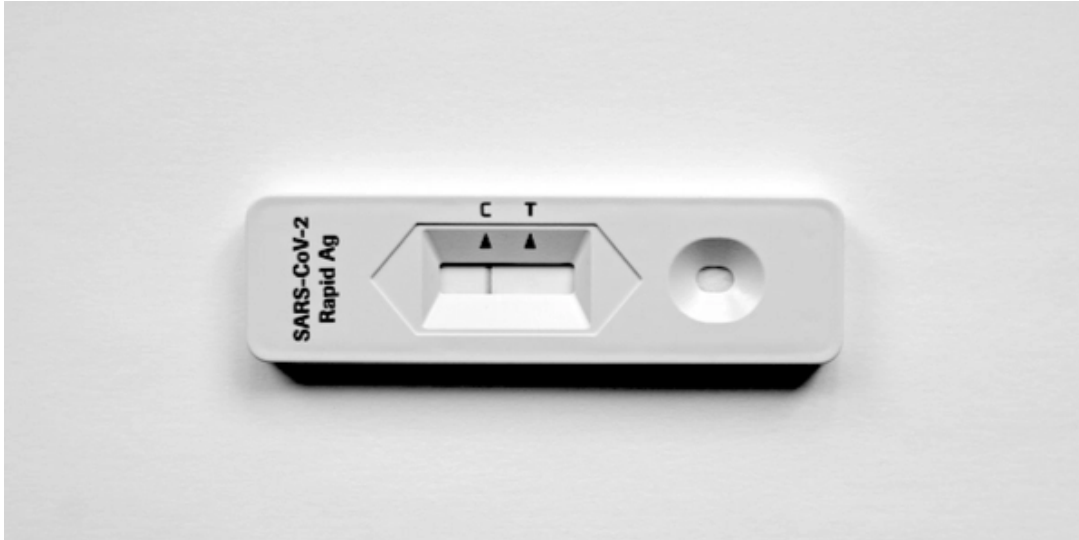


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# The Innova scandal Part 4: Questions the government must answer

By **Sonia Elijah** June 21, 2021



This is the fourth and final part of my investigation into the Innova Medical Group lateral flow test for Covid-19 – a test that the US has declared unsafe and [unfit for purpose](#), yet which the UK Government remains committed to, perhaps because of its £3.2billion ‘NHS Test and Trace’ investment in it. Today I turn to Innova’s Chinese-born owner, whose name should have set Whitehall alarm bells ringing, and his associates who won the lucrative supply and distribution contracts. You can read [Part 1](#) of my investigation [here](#), [Part 2 here](#) and [Part 3 here](#).

THE owner of Innova Medical Group, suppliers of the flawed lateral flow test (LFT) on which the British taxpayer has spent billions of pounds but which has been declared unsafe and only fit for the bin in America, is Chinese-born American businessman Dr Charles Huang (PhD in marketing from Strathclyde University).

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He has been associated with scandal in the past. As the financial director of a Chinese automotive manufacturer, Brilliance Group, he ‘played a key role in the strategic alliance between China’s Brilliance Group and MG Rover Group in the UK in 2002’. This is what his [biography page](#) on Pasaca Capital, the company that

wholly owns Innova Medical Group (IMG), at the heart of my investigation, proudly tells us.

In fact it is nothing to boast about. It was an ill-fated joint venture which was embroiled in scandal.

[MG Rover](#), the last of the domestically owned mass-production UK car manufacturers, went into administration in 2005 and inspectors were appointed by the Department for Trade and Industry to investigate the affairs of its parent company, Phoenix Venture Holdings (PVH).

[Written evidence](#) submitted by PVH to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Trade and Industry in 2004 reveals that MG Rover Group had been working in partnership with China Brilliance and that ‘unfortunately, a major dispute between the owner and the Provincial Government (had) resulted in China Brilliance’s inability to complete the project’.

The ‘major dispute’ refers to the [sudden departure](#) to the US of Brilliance’s chairman Yang Rong, who was wanted in China for alleged involvement in ‘economic crimes’. The head of Brilliance, Dr Brian X Sun, was also being investigated by the Chinese authorities and an arrest warrant had been issued for him too.

The reason for the termination of their joint venture with MG Rover was stated to be the ‘result of the non-receipt of payments due to MG Rover from the China Partner’.

In the 838-page [report into the affairs of PVH](#), (compiled at a cost to the taxpayer of £14.8million) MG Rover Group’s joint venture with Brilliance Group, also referred to as ‘Project Sunrise’, Charles Huang’s name is mentioned:

‘Mr Howe [MG Rover’s managing director] reported that during the course of the Board meeting he had taken a telephone conversation from Charles Haswell of the British Embassy in Beijing. He confirmed that he had requested the British Embassy to make enquiries on the Company’s behalf as to the identity and whereabouts of Yang Rong, Brian Sun and Charles Huang and the position in respect of the Brilliance Group of companies. Mr Haswell reported back that Mr Yang appeared to have fled to the United States of America where he was expected to stay. He further reported that Brilliance as a group of companies had never had any intention of building motor vehicles with the Company.’

The whereabouts of Dr Huang were not detailed.

The report also included an extract from an article in the *Financial Times*: ‘Several senior executives at Brilliance China Automotive Holdings Ltd . . . are under investigation over suspected asset stripping among the group’s sprawling network of subsidiaries.’

Given these associations, Charles Huang hardly sounds like a person for the UK Government to do business with. Does Whitehall not retain a list against whom potential government contractors can be checked?

If so, it was certainly ignored when it came to the Department of Health (DHSC) awarding its premature IMG contracts – the first one of which, [as I revealed in Part 3](#), was for £103million and was agreed nearly two months before the clinical

trial evaluation was completed and published, or the pilot using IMG LFTs started. Nor did Dr Huang's history stop the UK government from continuing to pay out close to £3billion to the Huang-owned IMG over successive months from 2020 to 2021 for more of its highly inaccurate Innova lateral flow tests which distinguished UK scientist John Deeks, in January 2021, [again warned the government about before their planned mass roll-out](#), and which the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has now abandoned.

How did Innova Medical Group come to get these lucrative UK government contracts in the first place? Who made the introduction? How was this one company chosen? Why was Innova given such preferential treatment by the joint PHE and Oxford University evaluation programme run by the DHSC, chaired by Matt Hancock and overseen by Sir John Bell of Oxford University?

Some of this I touched on in [Part 2](#). A Guardian report on the millions spent by the Government 'on controversial covid tests for Dominic Cummings's scheme' [last January](#) confirmed that the context was the imminent collapse of Operation Moonshot, Cummings's mass testing idea that preceded the LFT invention.

According to Professor Tim Peto, the chief investigator for the lateral flow tests under Sir John Bell, fellow Oxford academic and overseer of LFTs for the government, 'LFT was the knight in shining armour to save the day.' How long before the clinical trials were published that they decided that 'Innova was top of the pile', he does not reveal.

But by last summer a Cabinet Office Covid taskforce, including the Prime Minister's chief strategist Sir Edward Lister, was pressing 'cities around the country with rising caseloads' to pilot the new tests, well before their clinical evaluation.

A senior public health source indicated the pressure they were put under: 'Ed [Lister] and his team came to visit areas with high rates of Covid and kept mentioning LFTs and that the PM was very keen . . . When we raised questions, we were told . . . it was in Moonshot and was a proposal with endless amounts of money. The phrase they constantly used to us was "No regrets" and that Dominic Cummings's phrase was: "We want to get ahead of the science".'

Get ahead of the science Cummings did. He also appears to have 'got ahead' of the Government's normal protocols for clinical evaluation and procurement, detailed in Part 2, an irregularity (if not a transgression) which opened the way to an unknown start-up becoming the Government's highest-paid single covid contractor and turning over a multi-billion pound operation.

According to the *Guardian* the Oxford (LFT Clinical Evaluation) team presented the results of their evaluation of Innova's tests to Cummings in late October, with the health secretary, Matt Hancock. The decision to roll the tests out in a large field pilot as soon as possible was then pushed by Cummings, a couple of weeks before he resigned, with [Innova the lucky winner of this opportunity](#). MHRA (Medicines and Health products Regulatory Agency) approval quickly followed.

Mr Cummings resigned on November 13, 2020.

Why did he and Hancock discount the other LFTs that made it through the screening process?

In a joint webinar from the joint Royal College of Pathologists and British Infection Association, published on November 10, 2020, test investigator Professor Tim Peto of Oxford University is [recorded saying](#) (from 16 minutes): 'Four or five got through the screening process and one, Innova, was done first and we've got more data on that because of time – I'm not saying that the others aren't as good – and I'm going to present to you the Innova data because I think that is going to be distributed widely in the short term.'

This admission from Peto that other tests were potentially as good but that Innova was 'done first' and its data was presented because he believed that it was going to be 'distributed widely' appears to be a nod to the first contract with IMG before the clinical evaluation was completed. It was also Professor Peto who, in reference to the early procurement of the Innova test, admitted: 'We had to buy before we knew they worked', as referenced in [Part 2](#) of my report.

Questioned earlier this year on how IMG came to secure its huge UK government contracts in the first place, its CEO Daniel Elliott mentioned one company as 'key in helping them beat established industry giants'. He said the Northamptonshire-based [Disruptive Nanotechnology Ltd was pivotal](#). It agreed, he said, to help IMG negotiate the bureaucracy and the trials the test had to go through to win this Government deal.

The man once in charge of that company, a Northamptonshire-based businessman called Kim Thonger, today is in charge of marketing and operations at [Tried & Tested](#), the company that later won its way to being the sole UK distributor of Innova's tests. However this sole distributor of the Innova LFT was not always called Tried & Tested. It originally traded under the name of Disruptive Nanotechnology Ltd, the company that helped Elliot secure the IMG contract, a small company which until recently showed debts exceeding assets by a couple of thousand pounds.

Described by the *Daily Mail* as a [man with no previous healthcare background](#) who once worked for DKNY shoes and Dr Marten's, Mr Thonger managed to help Mr Elliott (and Dr Huang presumably) negotiate the biggest value Covid contract between the UK government and a single company. He has been aided latterly by his new partner Charles Palmer, who runs the company under its new name.

A [spokesperson for Tried & Tested](#) told the *Mail* that 'the company is the sole distributor of Innova lateral flow devices to the UK commercial market and is [not involved with Innova's UK government contract](#)'.

A single box of 25 Innova rapid antigen tests costs [£207.50](#). Thonger and Palmer are reported to get 'a few pence' for every test sold. With hundreds of millions of Innova tests purchased, a few pence for each is not insignificant.

It would be interesting to know how a former shoe salesman came to be pivotal in securing Innova's early contracts and how this same man, working under a new company name, came to be the 'exclusive UK and EU distributor' for the Innova Medical Group rapid antigen test in the commercial market. See Thonger's LinkedIn page below.

The *Private Eye* issue of [December 4-17, 2020](#), questioning the highly lucrative Innova deal with the UK Government and Disruptive Nanotechnology's involvement, which 'looked to be among the most questionable of the many previously unheard-of recipients of pandemic deals', throws further light on Mr Thonger's rebranded company:

'What little activity can be seen since it set up in 2015 is an unsuccessful attempt to sell LightCleanse, a technology coating surfaces in titanium dioxide that reacts with light to produce oxidants to clean the surface. Health concerns allegedly scuppered it. On latest figures (to December 2018) the firm was technically insolvent, with debts exceeding assets by a couple of thousand pounds. It is run by directors Kim Thonger and Charles Palmer, whose careers have taken in shoe retail and property respectively.'

The significance of this nanotechnology connection, also highlighted by the *Daily Mail*, between Thonger and Elliott remains obscure.

What we do know is that both men secured lucrative Innova LFT deals, thanks to the UK Government and at the taxpayer's expense.

This is more than an '[Operation Shambles](#)', as the *Daily Mail* has called the LFT and Moonshot/NHS Test and Trace saga. Despite a litany of warnings from some of Britain's top scientists about the deeply flawed nature of the test, the government not only determined to go ahead with this hubristic and ill-conceived programme but proceeded with a deeply questionable tendering and procurement process.

Nor has the FDA's thumbs-down to the Innova lateral flow device and IMG's own product recall in the US some months earlier, discussed in [Part 3](#), made any difference to the intransigent UK government. Disregarding the FDA's safety concerns, the [MHRA announcement on June 17](#) extended the UK's emergency use authorisation (EUA) of the (Innova) lateral flow devices used in the NHS Test and Trace programme through to August 28, 2021. Graeme Tunbridge, MHRA



Director of Devices, said: 'A full risk assessment was undertaken by DHSC as legal manufacturer of the LFDs in the UK and the MHRA has undertaken a thorough review to ensure that we were satisfied with the assessment and any action proposed.'

Yet this investigation has shown that the Chinese Xiamen Biotime Biotechnology is the actual manufacturer of the Innova test, not the DHSC, and if the latter were the 'legal' manufacturer a wholly independent risk assessment should have been done, not by the DHSC themselves. The UK public deserve to be shown the evidence of the 'thorough review' undertaken by the MHRA.

For the fortunate folks at IMG, Pasaca Capital, the Chinese manufacturer of the tests Xiamen Biotime and Tried & Tested, the gravy train rolls on. Not so for the UK public: £3.2billion of their money has been spent on the Government's relentless testing of the asymptomatic using this unreliable product, greatly inflating the number of Covid cases (while putting others at risk) to justify the draconian restrictions imposed on them.

Meanwhile mainstream media have yet to join the dots of this emerging scandal: that specious mass testing of the asymptomatic, far from leading the UK out of Covid lockdowns as Dominic Cummings reportedly naively hoped, are criminally designed to keep leading us into never-ending cycles of restrictions at our own vast expense.

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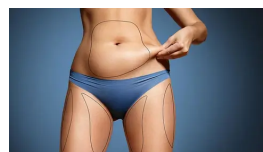
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