



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SECURITY

Alexander Fleming House, Elephant & Castle, London SE1 6BY

Telephone 01-407 5522

From the Secretary of State for Social Services

The Rt Hon George Younger TD MP
Secretary of State for Scotland
Scottish Office
Dover House
Whitehall
London SW1

23 July 1980

Dear George,

Thank you for your letter of 24 June about the Report of the Inter-Departmental Steering Group on Medical Manpower and the proposed statement on the future intake to the medical schools.

I fully agree with you that the Report's conclusions allow for a very broad range of possibilities; and there is certainly a considerable degree of uncertainty about the factors affecting the calculations of the numbers of doctors we should be training. I am therefore quite content to accept virtually the whole of the text of the revised statement which you attached to your letter.

However, as you will see from the enclosed draft, I have suggested one or two amendments. These stem either from comments received at official level from the Treasury and the DES or from my own reservations about your pessimism as regards possible medical unemployment. In spite of the fears of the medical profession (which are also expressed south of the border), the level of medical unemployment is at present negligible (about 0.5 per cent of all registered medical practitioners in Great Britain are registered as unemployed and their numbers have been falling in the last two quarters). Furthermore, while I accept that there is growing concern about the level of financial resources likely to be available in the public sector in the coming years, I feel sure that we must learn from the mistakes of our predecessors and not be blown off what is a very long-term course by short-term considerations. As the submission from my officials reported, the view of the Steering Group was that "although the prospects of medical unemployment could not be completely excluded, it was possible that there would be a short-fall of doctors by the end of the century if the intake to medical schools remained at or below 4,080 per year". In my view it would be premature, on the basis of the evidence available to us at present, to stress the likelihood of either of these alternatives coming about; and for this reason I would prefer to omit the last sentence of your third paragraph from the draft statement.

E.R.

I am planning to make this statement, by way of a written Reply, in the last week before Parliament rises, and it would therefore be very helpful to know soon whether you and the others to whom I am copying this letter are content with the attached draft. This goes, like yours, to Nicholas Edwards and to Mark Carlisle. My office is copying this exchange of correspondence to the Office of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Paymaster General's Office and to No 10.

Your ever
Patric

MEDICAL MANPOWER

DRAFT STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO AN INSPIRED PQ

Question - To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to make a statement on the size of the future medical school intake following consultations on his Department's discussion paper "Medical Manpower - the next 20 years".

SUGGESTED ANSWER:

Following the publication in the autumn of 1978 of the discussion paper "Medical Manpower - the next 20 years", comments from more than 100 organisations have been received and analysed. In addition, an Inter-Departmental Steering Group has prepared a report, based on further work by officials, on the country's likely long-term needs for medical manpower. Copies of the Group's report have today been placed in the Library and further copies will be obtainable from my Department on payment.

Because of the length of time it takes to train doctors, medical school intakes have to be planned on the basis of calculations which necessarily make assumptions about long-term trends in a number of factors. These include the level of financial resources likely to be available for the health and education programmes, the contribution made by overseas doctors, the career patterns of women doctors and changing working practices in the Health Service. None of these factors can be predicted with any precision and illustrative projections of ^athe range of options have been made for the purposes of the Inter-Departmental Steering Group's study. They do not, however, constitute a Government view of how the economy or the Health Services necessarily will or should progress, and they will need to be revised from time to time in the light of experience. Because of the unavoidable uncertainties involved in making these calculations, my rt hon friends and I share the view expressed by the Royal Commission on the NHS, representatives of the medical profession and the Steering Group that it is important for them to be regularly reviewed and the outcome made publicly known. My officials will discuss the arrangements for such reviews with the interests most closely concerned.

The planned annual target intake to medical schools in Great Britain stands at 4,080. The Government have concluded that there should at present be no change in either direction in that target figure, although we recognise that expenditure constraints may delay its complete achievement. In addition to ensuring the supply of an appropriate number of new doctors, it is also important that we make the most efficient use of those already in the Health Service. The Government will therefore do what it can to encourage flexibility in postgraduate medical training and in medical career structures.

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From the Secretary of State for Social Services

National Health

Petra Laidlaw
Private Secretary
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Privy Council Office
70 Whitehall
London SW1

22 July 1980

Dear Petra

MEDICAL MANPOWER - THE NEXT TWENTY YEARS

I attach correspondence between my Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Scotland as it proposes a statement by way of a Written Answer in the last week of Parliament.

Copies of this letter and attachments go to Nick Sanders (No 10) and Richard Prescott (PMG's Office).

*Yours ever
D. Brereton*

D. BRERETON

Private Secretary

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