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Topical Questions

Volume 716: debated on Tuesday 14 June 2022

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Wendy Chamberlain >

(North East Fife) (LD)

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T1. If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities. (900452 (Unique identification number))

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care >

(Sajid Javid)

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Today, we remember the 72 people who lost their lives and their loved ones affected by the Grenfell Tower tragedy five years ago.

In the Department of Health and Social Care, we are getting on with the job. We are focused on tackling the covid backlogs. Our new community diagnostic centres are springing up in towns and cities across the country, with 90 of the 160 planned already open and 1 million more tests, checks and scans already delivered. Last week, I set out our plans to modernise health and social care leadership, accepting all the recommendations of the leadership review by General Sir Gordon Messenger and Dame Linda Pollard. Just yesterday, I launched our new data strategy, called “Data saves lives”, to close the digital divide between health and care.

Wendy Chamberlain >

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Last month, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation published an interim statement on the autumn booster programme, in which—once again—unpaid carers have not been included. It is vital that they have equal access to vaccines to paid carers to keep their loved ones safe, as they continue to do right now. Will the Secretary of State advise me when we might receive a final statement from the JCVI on the autumn booster programme?

Sajid Javid >

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I thank the hon. Lady for raising the importance of getting vaccinations right. She will know that we rely on the independent advice of our clinicians—the committee known as the JCVI—and I think it is right that it is independent. Ultimately, it decides on its advice, and it is for Ministers whether to accept it. However, she has made an important point about unpaid carers, and I will ask the JCVI to see if that can be properly considered in the autumn booster review.

Martin Vickers >

(Cleethorpes) (Con)

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T6. 2002 I heard what the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), had to say about dentistry earlier, and I recognise the work she is doing to improve the situation. However, in northern Lincolnshire, like many other areas, we have very severe gaps in provision. Could the Minister outline what is being done to ensure that newly qualified dentists actually work in the NHS for a considerable time and that new practices are established in the areas where the need is greatest? (900458 (Unique identification number))

Sajid Javid >

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I am happy to respond to my hon. Friend. He is right that we of course want to ensure that everyone has timely access to NHS dentistry and that the profession is an appealing career choice. Health Education England has a dental education and reform programme, which will help retain new dentists in the NHS by placing training in areas of greatest need, and offer more flexibility and more career pathways. I can also tell him that, in Lincolnshire, commissioners are already looking at ways to support NHS dentistry through support such as the golden hello incentives.

Mr Speaker >

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I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Wes Streeting >

(Ilford North) (Lab)

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I associate myself with the Secretary of State's remarks as we remember the anniversary of the Grenfell Tower tragedy and support the families in their ongoing quest for justice. I also associate Opposition Members with your remarks, Mr Speaker, on the 40th anniversary of the end of the Falklands war.

Last night's shocking BBC "Panorama" investigation into Operose Health revealed the extent of the crisis in GP surgeries, with patient referrals and test results left unread for up to six months, and with patients being seen by less qualified staff standing in for GPs without supervision. This is exactly what happens when private profit is placed above patient health and safety. Why is the Secretary of State asleep at the wheel instead of launching an investigation into this scandal?

Sajid Javid >

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As I said earlier, the hon. Gentleman should reflect on the rule changes made by a previous Labour Government that allowed the management of many GP practices to change hands. When such serious allegations are made, it is right that local commissioners investigate them properly and independently. When it comes to GP access and capacity, I hope he will welcome that we are making a record investment, with over £0.5 billion of support during the pandemic, and recruiting GPs at a record rate.

Wes Streeting >

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The British people are sick and tired of hearing Conservative Ministers, after 12 years in government, passing the buck to everyone else and failing to take responsibility.

Let us look at another scandal that has happened on the Secretary of State's watch. It has now been weeks since he was warned about the negligence, the cover-up and the bribing of whistleblowers to stay silent about the scandals at the North East Ambulance Service. Since then, he has done precisely nothing to investigate the scandal. When will he address patient safety, get a grip and stop passing the buck? Or is this another case of the Government being, in the words of the Culture Secretary, found "wanting and inadequate"?

Sajid Javid >

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I told Members last week that I will review whether we can have an independent review of the North East Ambulance Service, and the NHS has agreed to an independent review. The hon. Gentleman stands up week after week and tries to claim he is on the side of patients and NHS workers, but we know he is actually on the side of those who are on strike—that is where his loyalties lie. Will he reflect on how many nurses will not be able to get to work and how many appointments will be unattended because of the transport strike? I know he wants to be the second coming of Tony Blair, but he is no more than a pound shop Ed Miliband.

Holly Mumby-Croft >

(Scunthorpe) (Con)

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T8. Many in the Scunthorpe area will remember David Hopkins, whom we sadly lost to glioblastoma. Alongside earlier diagnosis, we need improved access to the £40 million the Government have committed to brain tumour research. Will my right hon. Friend look carefully at the findings of the ongoing investigation by the all-party parliamentary group on brain tumours and do all he can to speed up access to this research funding? (900460 (Unique identification number))

Sajid Javid >

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My sincere condolences to the family of David Hopkins. Cancer diagnosis and treatment is an absolute priority, which is why we are putting £2.3 billion into campaigns and new initiatives to encourage people with suspected cancer to come forward. I am pleased that the referral rate is currently 120% of the pre-pandemic level. I will, of course, read the APPG's report. I visited the largest neurology hospital in the UK last month with my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), and I am determined to ensure that our investment in this vital area of research goes straight to the frontline.

Mr Speaker >

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I call the SNP spokesperson, Martyn Day.

Martyn Day >

(Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP)

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The Government have noted that Sir Robert Francis will give evidence on his work on the **infected blood** inquiry on 11 and 12 July, and said that they will act after hearing his evidence. What discussions has the Secretary of State had with Cabinet colleagues on the potential impact on victims' mental health of the lengthy waiting times for **compensation** in relation to contaminated **blood**?

Sajid Javid >

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The hon. Gentleman raises a very important issue. The House is well aware of the Government's work to bring justice to those who have been affected by contaminated **blood**, and we will continue to take that seriously.

Luke Hall >

(Thornbury and Yate) (Con)

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A new hospital at Thornbury would provide greater primary care and outpatient services, more GP appointments and a proactive frailty hub to support the elderly to stay in their own home longer. Our bid was submitted against the sustainability and transformation plan wave 4 capital pot, and I thank the Minister for all his work and effort in speaking to me, South Gloucestershire Council and our clinical commissioning group about this bid. Will he update the House on the timescales for its outcome?

The Minister for Health >

(Edward Argar)

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I am grateful to my hon. Friend; he rightly alludes to the fact that he is a strong champion of his constituents and has met me on a number of occasions to argue the merits of the Thornbury health centre. As he will be aware, we now have a multi-year capital settlement for our NHS, which will allow us the opportunity, through local systems, to consider the most appropriate projects for investment.

Mr Speaker >[Share](#)

Like Chorley.

Matt Western >

(Warwick and Leamington) (Lab)

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T2. Planned to process 300,000 tests a day, the Rosalind Franklin laboratory is handling just 30,000 a day. I understand that some scientists working there are being paid for five days but working just one day a week. Given that the lab cost £1.1 billion, almost twice the original budget, what does this say about the Minister's oversight of the programme? (900453 (Unique identification number))

Sajid Javid >[Share](#)

I am afraid that it was not clear to me which tests the hon. Gentleman was talking about; all I heard was "300,000 tests". So if he cares to write to me, I will respond properly to his question.

Mr Speaker >[Share](#)

I call the Chair of the Select Committee, Jeremy Hunt.

Jeremy Hunt >

(South West Surrey) (Con)

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Has the Secretary of State read the study in the *British Journal of General Practice* that says that people who see the same GP over many years are 30% less likely to go to hospital, 30% less likely to need out-of-hours care and 25% less likely to die? If he has, will he consider changing the GP contract to restore individual patient lists and reverse the change of two decades ago so that everyone has their own family doctor?

Sajid Javid >[Share](#)

I have not read that review, but now that my right hon. Friend has mentioned it I will certainly take a look at it. He raises an important point about access to GPs. He is right to say that many people would want to see the same GP again and again—that would be their preference. One can see how that may lead to better clinical outcomes, but I hope he will respect the fact that others do not mind if they do not see the same GP and just want rapid access. It is important that we get the right balance.

Imran Hussain >

(Bradford East) (Lab)

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T3. Despite the Secretary of State's assertion that we have had record investment in our GP practices, the reality remains that many of my constituents cannot get an appointment to see their GPs for days, if not weeks. That is putting their health at serious risk and forcing them to go to accident and emergency because there is nowhere else to go. In Bradford, we need a new hospital, and I will continue to campaign for that, but our imminent need is for an urgent treatment centre. Will he meet me to discuss that option seriously and provide the funding to our local NHS trust? (900454 (Unique identification number))

Sajid Javid >

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The hon. Gentleman is right to talk about the importance of timely access to GPs, whether in Bradford or across the country. There are, of course, challenges across the country, which is one reason why we put in place an action plan, including some £500 million of extra funding, during the pandemic. On his plea for an urgent treatment centre, I will make sure that the Health Minister will meet him.

James Wild >

(North West Norfolk) (Con)

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Before the jubilee weekend, I was pleased to welcome the Minister to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital to see the cracking RAAC—reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete—which the Department understands needs to be replaced. So will he take the opportunity to build a new QEH, fit for the future? When will the patients and staff at QEH know that they are on the list? They are impatient for a decision.

Edward Argar >

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It was a great pleasure to visit my hon. Friend before the jubilee weekend and to meet the staff who do such an amazing job at his local hospital. As ever, he puts his case clearly and firmly for a new hospital to replace the QE in King's Lynn, and we hope to be able to announce the longlist of those expressions of interest in due course.

Mr Speaker >

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Including Chorley, I hope.

Neale Hanvey >

(Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Alba)

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T4. In response to yesterday's urgent question on GDP, the Minister cited a drop in covid test uptake to explain the drop in GDP. Coronavirus test device approvals have been moving at glacial speed, with UK companies having to spend significant money preparing to mitigate this. Monkeypox also indicates unexplained changes in viral behaviours, and we know that covid is once again on the rise, so domestic diagnostics should be a vital component of effective prevention and strategic planning. Will the Secretary of State or a Minister meet me to discuss how best we harness these resources? (900455 (Unique identification number))

Sajid Javid >

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As I have said before, no country got every decision right during the pandemic, but one thing we did get right was our response in terms of diagnostics, vaccinations and antivirals. That combination allowed us to become the first country in Europe to open up and therefore also to boost our economy. I will make sure that the hon. Gentleman gets the meeting he has asked for.

Jack Brereton >

(Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con)

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As the Secretary of State knows from our previous discussions, we have serious concerns about West Midlands ambulance service and the significant delays we have experienced in north Staffordshire. The way to address the problems is by NHS partners working together, and Staffordshire fire service has said that it wants to do more to help the ambulance service. Will my right hon. Friend agree to do as much as he can to improve ambulance services in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire?

Sajid Javid >[Share](#)

My hon. Friend makes a very good point and some good suggestions. West Midlands ambulance service is my local ambulance service too, and I recently met its chief executive officer and chairwoman. As he knows, the NHS has published and is executing a 10-point plan for emergency service recovery, but I shall certainly take what he says into account.

Richard Burgon >

(Leeds East) (Lab)

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T5. Increasingly, hospitals have food banks to help NHS staff to cope with the cost of living crisis. Is it any wonder that the number of nurses leaving the NHS is at its highest for years? After a decade of pay cuts, will not yet another below-inflation pay award mean that even more nurses leave, which will have a hugely detrimental impact on patient care? (900456 (Unique identification number))

Sajid Javid >[Share](#)

I am pleased to say that we have more nurses working for the NHS than at any point in its history, and last year we recruited an additional 10,900.

Sir Christopher Chope >

(Christchurch) (Con)

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Does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State accept that some people have died as a direct result of having had covid-19 vaccines?

Sajid Javid >[Share](#)

I accept that the vaccine has not worked in the intended way for every single person. I am afraid that this is a risk with any vaccine that has ever been approved in any major country. It is right, however, that when something goes wrong with a vaccination, it is looked at appropriately, and I am happy to discuss this further with my hon. Friend.

Patricia Gibson >

(North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP)

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T7. On Friday, the cross-party Public Accounts Committee described the UK Government's procurement of £4 billion of unusable PPE during the pandemic, which is now to be burned, as the result of a "haphazard purchasing strategy". Who does the Secretary of State believe should be held responsible for this unacceptable squandering of taxpayers' money through awarding multiple deals to friends and associates of Ministers or senior Tories, and the deadly mismanagement of the supply of PPE? (900459 (Unique identification number))

Sajid Javid >[Share](#)

I hold the covid virus responsible.

Nick Fletcher >

(Don Valley) (Con)

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I thank the Secretary of State for his recent visit to Doncaster Royal Infirmary. I apologise for the fact that the lights went out while he was there—it was not planned, but it did bolster my campaign for a new hospital. Will he meet me again during Men's Health Week, to discuss a men's health strategy, which many Members across the House believe would help an awful lot of men?

Sajid Javid >[Share](#)

Yes, that is a very important issue and I will be happy to meet my hon. Friend.

Mohammad Yasin >

(Bedford) (Lab)

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When I wrote to the Minister recently about my concerns about NHS dentistry waiting times, I was advised that my constituent was not restricted by geography, which implied that he should travel for an appointment, but the whole of the east of England has been identified by the Association of Dental Groups as a dental desert. The Minister is well aware of this problem, the severe workforce shortages and the broken dentistry contracts. When will the Government stop blaming the dental practices, get on with the job and get the workforce this country needs?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care >

(Maria Caulfield)

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This Government are not blaming dentists for the pressures they are facing. If anyone is to blame, it is the Labour Government for their 2006 contract. We are amending that contract, and will make an announcement before the summer recess.

Kerry McCarthy >

(Bristol East) (Lab)

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Suicide prevention organisations such as the Campaign Against Living Miserably and Papyrus are, sadly, needed more than ever, yet in the current economic climate, because they tend to rely on charitable donations, they are struggling to provide the services to meet demand. What will the Government do to make sure they survive and provide the life-saving services that are so badly needed?

The Minister for Care and Mental Health >

(Gillian Keegan)

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Of course every suicide is a tragedy. We must do all we can to help to prevent suicide. In the last financial year, we provided £5.4 million to 113 voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations; we also provided £510,000 for the Samaritans helpline for people experiencing distress. That is in addition to more than £10 million we provided to voluntary and charitable mental health organisations in 2020-21.

Jim Shannon >

(Strangford) (DUP)

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As IVF treatment is incredibly time sensitive, will the Secretary of State consider increasing the funding available to allow couples to make use of private facilities on the NHS, to help families have the children that they so much want?

Maria Caulfield >[Share](#)

I cannot comment on health in Northern Ireland specifically as it is a devolved matter. IVF will be a significant factor in the women's health strategy, because we recognise the disparities that exist across the country in how couples currently access IVF.

Hilary Benn >

(Leeds Central) (Lab)

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The site for the new Leeds children's hospital and the adult hospital building, the Leeds General Infirmary, will be cleared by the end of this month. The trust is raring to go to build these wonderful new facilities. Can the Secretary of State tell me when the final go-ahead for the construction will be given?

Sajid Javid >[Share](#)

The right hon. Gentleman will know that I have visited the site and spoken to local members of the trust. It is a project that we support, and we are in the final stages of the final approvals.

Ronnie Cowan >

(Inverclyde) (SNP)

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As was pointed out by the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), this Government promised medical cannabis on the NHS 1,183 days ago. Since then, a child with epilepsy will have experienced, at a modest estimate, 35,490 seizures. We have free NHS prescriptions, which proves that the medicine exists and is approved for use in the United Kingdom. How much longer must those children suffer?

Maria Caulfield >[Share](#)

As I have said, I met the Scottish Minister on this. Scotland is facing exactly the same problem. Where medicinal cannabis is licensed, 9,631 prescriptions have been issued in primary care and 58,000 in secondary care, thanks to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State who changed the law at the time.