

cc Mr Wilson
Mr James

National Health
Prime Minister

To note

Copied to National Health:
Private Medical Care
May 1979.

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22/5

PRIME MINISTER

I had an excellent and friendly meeting with the leaders of the medical profession on Monday evening. Two points arose, of which I think you ought to be aware.

2. The BMA was on the point of dropping another letter onto your doormat, urging a swift decision on the Doctors and Dentists Review Body Report. I dissuaded them from doing this by assuring them that we had the matter under urgent investigation. They pointed out that the understanding between the profession and successive Governments has been that Governments would do their best to publish the Report with their decision within 3 weeks of their receiving the Report from the Review Body. Of course, the BMA recognise that for this purpose they cannot count the period prior to the Election, and indeed they accepted that the three weeks should run from 8 May, the date when effectively I took over this Department. I had hoped that we would have been able to announce our conclusions before the House rises for the Whitsun Recess, but I entirely understand the reasons that prompted you to delay a decision to next week. You will understand however, that I would be in some embarrassment if we could not reach a conclusion by the end of next week.

It will be on the agenda for E Committee next Thursday.

We had to postpone the meeting because the Treasury paper on fees was not ready.

3. The other point concerns our commitment to facilitate the wider use of private medical care. I have deliberately held my peace in the face of the provocative statements by COHSE and NUPE, since I take the view that it is sensible to make public pronouncements when one has something positive and constructive to say. We are, of course, working on plans which will achieve our objective, and you may like to know that the doctors last night made some suggestions which I hope may help to defuse the union position, while meeting the central purpose which we have set ourselves. In the meantime, I would not regard it as helpful

to answer provocation with provocation, and I feel sure that this will have your support.

I am copying this minute to Willie Whitelaw, Geoffrey Howe, Jim Prior, George Younger and Nicholas Edwards.

P.J.

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