

MR WILLETTS

AIDS

Reference your minute of October 27.

There is certainly a feeling abroad that the Government is doing too little, and is not treating the issue with sufficient urgency. There is also a feeling that the Prime Minister is acting as a brake on educational publicity.

The 24 provincial editors who dined with the Prime Minister last week will have gone away with the view that the Prime Minister was cautious on the idea of a house-to-house leaflet drop.

It is interesting that in a short free-for-all discussion of this issue the editors:

- showed they are very much alive to the AIDS threat and are dealing with it seriously
- consider that, whatever they do, only a Government publicity campaign will lend ultimate authority to their campaigns
- claimed that only a Government campaign could counteract the damaging effects of the sensational treatment of the issue by such papers as the Sun
- argued that the Government should not be reticent on grounds of public taste - after all, the Government ran VD information campaigns during the war in a much more morally repressive climate
- suggested that the Government should also take decisive action to screen visitors and immigrants.

(I have told Romola Christopherson, DHSS, of this discussion.)

Against this background, I believe there is much to be said for the Prime Minister's having a briefing/review meeting with DHSS Ministers and officials - and for her letting it be known she is doing so. Ideally, however, that meeting ought to be followed not merely by a Lobby briefing by me, but by a DHSS statement demonstrating that action is flowing.

In short, I see merit in the Prime Minister's being seen to be taking a close personal interest in the issue, but there is much greater merit in being able to report action immediately after the meeting, if only trailing an early announcement of new action.

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