



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY

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From the Secretary of State for ~~Social Services~~ Health

Prime Minister
The NAO/PAC have looked at
deputising services only recently - see
flagged page. AT 10/4

Andrew Turnbull Esq
Principal Private Secretary
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LONDON SW1A

10 April 1989

Dear Andrew

DEPUTISING SERVICES - CURRENT POSITION

You asked for a note about the use of GP deputising services.

Following an investigation into the management of Family Practitioner Services by the National Audit Office, which included deputising services, the PAC interviewed officials and published a report in October 1988.

The PAC found that whilst Family Practitioner Committees had taken steps, including the use of medically qualified liaison officers to ensure the quality of deputising services, there was evidence that some GPs do exceed agreed limits of use. Some Family Practitioner Committees had sought to verify the extent of usage from deputising services, either directly or through GPs, but had been unable to obtain the necessary information. The Department said that the system itself was sound but acknowledged that the existing guidance was not sufficiently robust on this issue. The Department plans to circulate improved guidance which should enable all Family Practitioner Committees to reach the standards of control which were already being achieved by the best.

The areas the Department is looking at in particular are:

- a. extending FPC monitoring to cover both standards and numerical usage by GPs of deputising services;
- b. tightening up the procedure for giving consent to the use of deputising services;
- c. sanctions against GPs who make use of deputising services in excess of the approved limit.

E.R.

The extent of abuse of the present arrangements is indirectly an issue in the current dispute over the GPs Contract. We have plans to introduce a lower fee where night visits to patients are carried out by a deputising service. This would have the effect of discouraging over-use of those services and is still being resisted by the BMA.

I hope this is helpful.

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F. Goldhill

PP

FLORA GOLDHILL
Private Secretary

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