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Prime Minister

**GPs CONTRACT: TARGETS**

I have seen Kenneth Clarke's note to you of 22 March.

For the reasons which prompted me to suggest that we think again about the calculation of these targets, I am afraid I do not find the revised draft "Dear Colleague" letter sufficiently convincing. It carries too many assertions which will simply invite further challenge, for example about no-one disputing the potential benefits of these screening programmes and the targets being pitched at levels which allow for refusals. The references to GPs taking a more active role in contacting patients and explaining fully to them the benefits of screening will fuel the apprehension which exists about the effect of the targets on doctor/patient relationships. These consultations will be different from the normal ones because they will be unsolicited by the patient and involve a degree of financial motivation by the doctor.

I take Kenneth's point about the timing and the need to avoid uncertainty but the final paragraph of the letter in effect offers a review and there are too many words in the letter which will be difficult to eat if we do have to introduce changes in the light of experience.

My previous suggestion of allowing patients to "sign out" could be quickly implemented in that it does not change the targets but would require Health Boards/FHSAs to be notified of a change in the method of calculating them. The preparation of the necessary forms and means of checking them would obviously take a certain amount of time. I accept that this approach carries the risk of rewarding doctors for little more screening; a better way would be to offer a bonus payment for each patient screened above a set minimum along the lines of the sliding scale approach we discussed but there is obviously no time to consider that for 1990-91.

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I agree with Kenneth that the ultimate aim must be a reduction in deaths by means of increased screening but that long term success has to be set against the short term political damage from present perceptions of our proposals. That is something we should counter now rather than risk allowing it to run on.

I am copying this note to Kenneth Clarke, Peter Walker and Peter Brook.

*Jim Reville*

*PP*

M R

*(Approved by the Secretary of State  
and signed in his absence.)*

Scottish Office  
23 March 1990

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