

PRIME MINISTER

cc: Mr. Ingham
Mr. Norgrove
Mr. Willetts

PRESENTING THE NHS

Papers for the meeting are:

- Flag A: Minute by Mr. Fowler. ✓
Flag B: Bernard's note. ✓
Flag C: Paper by David Willetts.
Flag D: A Central Office note (which you have not yet seen)

They contain excellent material.

Those attending are:

Lord Whitelaw
Mr. Tebbit
Mr. Clarke
Chief Whip?
Mr. Hayhoe
Mr. Ingham
Mr. Willetts

I suggest that the meeting does not discuss the following:

- (i) the new Chairman of the NHS Management Board;
(ii) the organisation of the NHS;
(iii) extra money for the NHS.

- Women
£150
- heart
cancer

I suggest you concentrate on:

- (i) how can we best present the product as it now is -
the NHS as it is today; and

- (ii) how can we develop the attraction of the product between now and the General Election?

The meeting needs to produce concrete action under (i) and (ii).

You might begin the discussion by asking why, despite all our best efforts, Government policies on the NHS are still receiving a poor press. Possible reasons:

- The NHS is traditionally a weak area for the Conservatives.
- Presentation has been somewhat reactive to criticism, rather than positive.
- Much criticism is about local conditions on which the DHSS centre cannot easily give a quick response.
- The Government faces a fearsome coalition of knockers - from the low paid unions to high paid consultants.

Presenting the Product

Putting patients first

1. First, we need to decide the theme. Mr. Fowler at Flag A suggests shifting the debate from inputs into the NHS to outputs. Central Office emphasise supplying information of a type which people can relate to their own experience (paragraph 4 of flag D). Is this the right approach? How can it be carried forward in practice?

2. Then, we need to decide the organisation of the campaign. Bernard's note (at Flag B) sets out the elements of an organisation - at national, regional and district level: a task force of administrative and information officers under the Secretary of State's chairmanship. Mr. Fowler, in note 2 of his minute at Flag A, proposes a broadly similar approach with a strategic committee and central unit. Do these approaches provide the right organisation? In particular, are

they sufficient to meet criticism at district level? How do we react to hostile criticism about say, kidney machines in West Yorkshire? Who replies? Do we have to rely on the local, regional and district health authority? How can they be geared up to give the right response? Are they on the Government's side in the sense that they will rebut criticism vigorously; or will they use local criticism as an excuse for asking for extra funds?

3. We should foster corporate spirit of NHS staff so that they are more ready to defend their service. Notes 4 and 5 of Mr. Fowler's minute at Flag A set out some ideas. Paragraph 8 of the Central Office note stresses the importance of getting the NHS professionals (nurses and doctors) on the Government's side, and suggests ways of doing this.

4. We should mobilise the Government's allies outside the service. There are some useful ideas on page 5 of David Willetts' note at Flag C and in the comments at paragraph 9 of the Central Office note.

5. We need to find the issues on which to attack Labour health service policies, on which see page 4 of David Willetts' note at Flag C.

The papers contain many good ideas. If they are to be implemented effectively, DHSS needs to designate a senior official at Under Secretary level to be in charge of the campaign. If responsibility is diffused through DHSS, the impact will be lost.

Developing the Product

We need, too, to identify initiatives, within agreed spending plans, over the next 18 months, which will demonstrate the Government's commitment to the NHS. Possibilities referred to in the papers are:

- reductions in waiting lists
- better protection for women
- improvements to London and other inner cities
- and there must be others.

Mr. Fowler needs to develop such initiatives urgently and present them vigorously.

Summing Up

In your summing up of the meeting, you will want to ensure that Mr. Fowler is given firm guidance on presenting better the existing product and developing it over the next 18 months. You should ask him for progress reports in three months' time on what has been done and in six months' time on the effectiveness of the campaign.

N. L. W.

N. L. Wicks

8 July 1986