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PRIME MINISTER

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AT 14/6

WHAT PEOPLE THINK OF THE HEALTH SERVICE

Marplan have polled 1,500 adults to find out what they think of the Health Service. Most people had a high opinion of the NHS: 36% thought that it was either extremely or very good, and a further 41% that it was fairly good.

But there are interesting variations.

- People had a higher opinion of their own treatment than of the Health Service in general. 83% of respondents were satisfied with the medical treatment they had *ie it's better than you read about in the newspapers* received. And the groups registering the highest opinion of the Health Service were those with most experience of the Health Service (women and pensioners). The higher opinion of what has been experienced than what hasn't shows the effectiveness of Opposition propaganda.
- Out-patients had a significantly lower opinion than in-patients of both their medical and their non-medical treatment. The out-patient department - the crucial link between the GP and the hospital - is where the NHS provides its poorest service.

- Londoners have a lower opinion of the Health Service, and the Scots a surprisingly high opinion. London does quite well from health expenditure. So either sophisticated Londoners have higher standards, or the rows over the future of London teaching hospitals are affecting Londoners' perceptions. I will be thinking more about how to defuse the London teaching hospital issue, which Frank Dobson is very adept at exploiting.

67% of people thought that our spending on the Health Service was too low. But they were then asked where this extra finance should come from. The replies are surprisingly encouraging:

<u>Source of extra funds</u>	<u>%</u>
Local finance	10
Cutting other Govt. expenditure (eg roads, education, social services, pensions)	48
Increased charges	2
Patient contributions towards cost of NHS treatment	14
Increased taxation	12
Others/Don't know	16

So there is no appetite for either higher taxation or higher spending in total.

The poll also covered consumerist issues where we can improve services without having to push up public expenditure. 27% of patients thought they received too little information during their stay in hospital, as against 68% who thought it was about right, and only 1% who thought they got too much information. And those who thought their non-medical treatment was not very good complained in particular about lack of attention (37%); unsympathetic staff (15%); waiting times (13%); and poor/inadequate food (12%).

So there is scope for the new Managers to improve hospital standards without undermining clinical judgments, and without spending more money. We should, for instance, issue a "Patient's Charter" setting out areas where we expect Health Authorities to improve services to the patient.

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