Sarah Wollaston (Totnes, Conservative)

The Secretary of State will be aware of the report in The Daily Telegraph setting out how hospital episode statistics data were sold to insurance companies, which were able to match that information with credit ratings data. Nothing will undermine this valuable project more than a belief that data will be sold to insurance companies, so will he set out the way in which he will investigate how that sale was allowed to happen and categorically reassure the House that there will be no sale of care data to insurance companies?

Jeremy Hunt (The Secretary of State for Health; South West Surrey, Conservative)

My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that issue and I am happy to give that assurance. That incident is one of the reasons why we set up the Health and Social Care Information Centre through the Health and Social Care Act 2012, in the teeth of opposition from the Labour party. Following the establishment of the centre, the guidelines in place mean that such a thing could not happen. She is also right that it is important that we reassure the public because, let us not forget, it was this important programme that identified the link between thalidomide and birth defects, that identified that there was no link between MMR and autism, and that helped to identify the link between smoking and cancer, so it is vital that we get this right.

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