Minimum Practice Income Guarantee

Sarah Wollaston (Totnes, Conservative)

As somebody who has worked in a small rural community, where there are high levels of deprivation in an area of relative affluence, the difficulty is that many people cannot access transport to get to services in other locations. I agree with my hon. Friend that we must prioritise access in small rural communities and recognise the problems of rural poverty.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale, Liberal Democrat)

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that strong and good point. What counts as poverty in rural areas is often very different from what counts as poverty in urban areas. It is poverty in terms not only of income but of access to services. The average age of my constituents is 10 years higher than the average age of the UK population, so isolation and lack of access to private transport, never mind public transport, make it physically impossible to access another service. That is why we need to intervene.

Sarah Wollaston (Totnes, Conservative)

Regarding the point about funding following the number of patients, the Minister will be aware that there is now greater flexibility for patients to register. Relatively young, mobile patients may choose to be registered near their place of work; indeed, they should have that flexibility. However, that is an additional income drain on small and sparsely located practices. Is the Minister aware of that?

Daniel Poulter (The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health; Central Suffolk and North Ipswich, Conservative)

Absolutely. I alluded to that point in some of my earlier comments. We know that there is the tourist trade, which is an important part of the local economy in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale. Recognition of that factor is built into the funding formula for GP practices. People moving locally to work somewhere is already taken into account as part of the formula, which will benefit the funding of some of the local practices in my hon. Friend's constituency. I hope that is a helpful clarification of the point about people moving from one location to another.

Sarah Wollaston (Totnes, Conservative)

Does the Minister accept that not all sparsely populated areas will see that offset by incoming tourists? Many areas of the country will not see that offset benefit.

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