Sarah Wollaston (Totnes, Conservative) Click here to watch Sarah speak

I join the Secretary of State in paying tribute to Pauline Cafferkey and all NHS volunteers, aid workers, staff at DFID and Public Health England for the work they are doing to keep us safe in the UK by fighting Ebola on the front line in west Africa at great personal risk. I also thank him for updating the House so succinctly on the improvements to the screening protocols, so that everyone will be screened if they have symptoms, not just a temperature. Will he update the House on the vaccines and say whether there has been any progress on the provision of rapid screening for Ebola? Will he reassure us that he will not follow the knee-jerk response that we have heard calls for from some quarters, which is to quarantine all NHS staff, because of the unintended consequences of such an approach?

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

I thank my hon. Friend for her constructive comments and I agree with what she has said on this issue. Some 678 health care workers have contracted Ebola since the outbreak of the disease, and of those nearly 400 have died, the vast majority African. That shows how incredibly brave front-line workers are, and perhaps the fact that “tragically” we have someone in this country who has contracted Ebola is a good way of reminding ourselves that many hundreds of other people have already been in this situation. They are all incredibly brave. We are proceeding as quickly as we can with the possibility of having a much speedier Ebola test, which would obviously be helpful for the screening process.

I agree with my hon. Friend that we do not want a knee-jerk response on quarantining people who come back. The contribution of NHS volunteers and health care workers from western countries in fighting the disease in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia is critical. Some 1,500 people from the NHS have volunteered, but they volunteer on the basis that we will follow proper clinical protocols, meaning quarantining people when it is clinically necessary to do so, but not doing so when it is not necessary. If we are to keep their confidence, we must be proportionate in our response.

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