Sarah Wollaston (Totnes, Conservative)

I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. I am concerned. Does he understand the difference between a pilot and an experiment? Does he not think it is right that the Secretary of State should listen to clinically led advice about how we might improve ambulance waiting times, rather than just roll out changes without a pilot, not an experiment?

Andy Burnham (Shadow Secretary of State for Health; Leigh, Labour)

I do not think there is a massive difference between a pilot and an experiment. My objection is that that is being introduced in winter—and a difficult winter at that—in the most troubled ambulance service. I am not against a pilot, but it should be conducted at a quieter time of year. I should have thought that bringing it in now would strike the hon. Lady, with her long experience of the NHS, as more than a slightly risky thing to do.

I need to hear today the Secretary of State’s plan. What is his plan to bring standards in ambulance services and A and E back up to where they should be? If he waits much longer to tell us, people will conclude that he simply does not have one. The simple truth is that our hospitals are full and operating way beyond safe bed occupancy levels. It is a system that is visibly creaking at the seams.

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