There are only losers in this bitter dispute, but those who have the most to lose are patients and their families. Tomorrow people will visit hospitals to see those whom they care about more than anything in the world, and will ask themselves why the doctors on the picket line are not inside looking after the people they love. May I ask the British Medical Association directly whether it will show dignity, put patients first, and draw back from this dangerous escalation? May I ask all sides, whatever provocation they may feel, to put patients first in this dispute?

Jeremy Hunt The Secretary of State for Health

My hon. Friend has spoken very wisely. She recently wrote, in The Guardian, something with which I profoundly agree: she wrote that there could have been a solution to this problem back in February, when a very fair compromise was put on the table in relation to the one outstanding issue of substance, Saturday pay.

I understand that this is a very emotive issue. The Government initially wanted there to be no premium pay on Saturdays, but in the end we agreed to premium pay for anyone who works one Saturday a month or more. That will cover more than half the number of junior doctors working on Saturdays. It was a fair compromise, and there was an opportunity to settle the dispute, but unfortunately the BMAnegotiators were not willing to take that opportunity. I, too, urge them, whatever their differences with me and whatever their differences with the Government, to think about patients tomorrow. It would be an absolute tragedy for the NHS if something went wrong in the next couple of days, and they have a duty to make sure that it does not.

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