Sarah Wollaston (Totnes Conservative) Click here to watch Parliament Live

Is my right hon. Friend aware that about 30,000 people a year in this country die as a result of alcohol, and that Department of Health modelling has shown that if we were to increase the minimum price per unit to 50p we would save over 2,000 lives a year? Will he look at the proposals published in the British Medical Journal to have variable rates of VAT so we can increase the price without penalising the on-licence trade?

Andrew Lansley (Secretary of State Health)

My hon. Friend will know that the Chancellor of the Exchequer made an announcement today about the level of duty on beers, in particular. We have made it clear, in the coalition agreement and since, that we will act to ban the below-cost selling of alcohol. I think that that will make a significant difference. We will also in due course publish an alcohol strategy, through which we will examine a range of ways in which we can not only enforce the current legislation more effectively, but create an environment in which we progressively reduce the abuse of alcohol. It is very important for us to understand that we must distinguish between our relationship with tobacco, whose use we want to minimise—we want to encourage people never to use tobacco—and our relationship with alcohol, where we are seeking its responsible use, rather than seeking to penalise people who engage in responsible drinking.

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