Health

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

On 21 June, conscientious, hard-working doctors will be putting their patients before the British Medical Association's ill-judged call for industrial action. Can the Secretary of State confirm to the House, however, how many surgeries, operations and clinics will be needlessly cancelled, and how much all this will cost the NHS?

Andrew Lansley (Secretary of State, Health; South Cambridgeshire, Conservative)

I entirely understand my hon. Friend's concern, and I applaud the way in which she has expressed it. The BMA's proposed action could result in up to 30,000 operations being cancelled, as many as 58,000 diagnostic tests being postponed, and more than 200,000 outpatient appointments being rescheduled. I do not think that the House will understand why the BMA would risk patient safety in that way, when it knows perfectly well that its action will have no benefit and that we cannot now go beyond the basis for pension reform that has been agreed with the majority of the NHS trade unions, especially in circumstances in which doctors will continue to receive an extremely generous pension worth up to £68,000 a year at the end of their working lives. I think that Andy Burnham and I share the view that this is not a justified position for the NHS to take. The pension is intended to be a generous one. Through the negotiations with the BMA and the other trade unions, we arrived at a very generous pension scheme.

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