

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Health
By email

11 February 2016

Dear Mr Hunt

Thank you for your reply on the 26th November to my letter regarding your statement in the House of Commons on 13th October:

“According to an independent study conducted by The BMJ, there are 11,000 excess deaths because we do not staff our hospitals properly at weekends.”

This is not an accurate report of the BMJ article nor is it a rough approximation. This particular claim is both bold and specific about cause and effect and source: 11,000 excess deaths because of inadequate staffing of hospitals at weekend, according to the BMJ.

You will have read Sir Andrew Dilnot’s letter on the same topic. He notes that the BMJ article says there is not a definite causal link between the weekend mortality rates it highlights and the nature of service provision at the weekend. The UK Statistics Authority also said it is speaking to officials at the Department of Health to ask that future references to the article are clear about the difference between implying a causality that the article does not demonstrate, and describing the conclusions reached by the authors.

The Authority also said that questions about the Ministerial Code of Conduct are a matter for the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Health.

I am therefore copying this letter to the new Permanent Secretary to bring this matter to his attention. In the course of Parliamentary debate I understand that Ministers will sometimes express themselves in ways that on reflection do contain inadvertent errors. I hope that on reflection the Minister will accept that that has happened in this case.

I ask the Permanent Secretary to take the necessary steps to ensure the Ministerial Code is fulfilled, and a correction to the Parliamentary record arranged.

Yours sincerely

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