

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

23 October 2015

Dear Mr Hunt

For some time the government has been drawing attention to the topic of weekend hospital staffing. On 13th Oct you said in the House of Commons:

“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”.

The research you refer to does not say that understaffing at hospitals is responsible for 11,000 deaths. The research found 11,000 excess deaths occurred but explicitly says it would be “rash and misleading” to assume these are avoidable.

The Department of Health has done some good work recently on transparency, introducing an internal data document as part of the preparation for Ministers’ speeches so that the press office can respond more quickly to Full Fact and the media. It risks being overshadowed or undermined by this use of the research.

We recognise the importance of the issue. Lives, as you say, may be at stake. You are well-placed to commission further research to clarify this, which would be welcome.

We also recognise that it is not always possible to avoid mistakes when speaking ad hoc. Nevertheless, what you said in the House of Commons is inaccurate and we hope you will recognise that it is now necessary for you to write to the editor of Hansard to correct the official report.

Yours sincerely




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