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PRIME MINISTER

Mr. David Skidmore telephoned this evening to say that he believed that criticism of the NHS would get a lot worse in the next month or so. There would be more stories of wards closing and of difficult cases. One reason was that this was the time of the year that nurses took time off for Christmas and the New Year. This would put pressure on hospital services and some wards might be closed temporarily. This was also the time of the year when many junior hospital doctors - just out of medical schools - shifted duties and this could cause difficulties for consultants like him. He was not scare-mongering but wanted you to be ready to expect a difficult time.

I asked him what could be done. He doubted whether the Government could do much in the short term. It was up to the profession to cope. He suggested that someone senior - I assume the Government's CMO - should talk to the Heads of the Royal Colleges to suggest to their colleagues in the profession that special action is taken, by altering work practices, etc, to cope with the situation in the short term. One possibility was for hospitals to delay "medium-size" operations and treatments, concentrating on the big emergencies - which had to be done to save lives - and small routine cases - which would keep the numbers of patients treated up.

*N.L.W.**ms*

(N. L. WICKS)

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