

Prime Minister
I registered earlier in the year you wish to be kept
fully informed about this. This latest report adds little
to let you already know; Policy Unit will keep in touch.

PRIME MINISTER

REC
2/17

22 July 1988

PROPOSED CLOSURE OF THE CLINICAL RESEARCH CENTRE

The Medical Research Council is proposing a major expansion of the Royal Postgraduate Medical School in Hammersmith at an estimated cost of £90m (1987 prices) over eight years. The Clinical Research Centre (CRC) in Northwick Park - opened in 1970 - would be closed down and most of the staff transferred to Hammersmith. The MRC believes that £4m could be saved in annual running costs. And the implementation of the proposals would release space and facilities at Northwick Park to the Region with a capital value of around £40m.

Does the region want or need them?

[Friday]
This morning, I attended a presentation on this subject given by Lord Jellicoe and Dr Rees of the MRC. Kenneth Baker, John Moore and Tony Newton were present. Tony Newton appears to support the MRC's strategy in principle; John Moore has an open mind on the proposal, while Kenneth Baker is rather more sceptical. The MRC's main arguments for the proposal are compelling, if the cost implications are totally ignored:

- the ties between research and clinical work are much stronger in Hammersmith;
- the Northwick Park district general hospital has not represented an attractive location for leading clinical scientists;
- the standard of research at the CRC has fallen short of the MRC's expectations;

- the absence of postgraduate education has deprived the CRC of direct recruitment of the best young scientists into clinical research.

Yet many questions will have to be answered by the MRC before a decision can be taken. For example:

- Do the benefits outweigh the significant investment and extremely long construction period?
- Could the CRC be managed more effectively? Perhaps the CRC could operate as a Hammersmith 'satellite'.
- Could each location specialise?
- Would the closure of the CRC really generate £40m in cash?

Conclusion

As many questions still need to be addressed, one should be wary of the MRC's proposal at this stage.

In view of the DES scepticism, there is no need for intervention at this stage, at least until a formal proposal is made by the MRC. I will monitor developments closely - keeping you informed.

Ian Whitehead

IAN WHITEHEAD

What possible grounds can there be for moving research units London? I understand the region does not need more beds. This sounds a typical piece of extravagant cost expenditure. not