

Wes Streeting really should start talking sense

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As [The Guardian reports this morning](#):

[Wes] Streeting said on Monday that a Labour government would offer incentives for GP practices in England where patients were regularly able to see the same or a named doctor, and impose penalties on those less able to achieve this.

As they also report:

[The] proposal for patients to be able to request a particular GP is “an impossible ask” given the shortage of doctors, the British Medical Association (BMA) has said, heralding another possible clash with Wes Streeting, the shadow health secretary.

The BMA is right. Streeting’s claim that Labour would “bring back the family doctor”, meaning patients would be able to see the same GP for each appointment if they wanted, is utterly ludicrous for three reasons.

First, doctors are not in call seven days a week, 24 hours a day. Streeting might have a 1950s fantasy that they are, but back then the number of patient contacts a GP had each year was maybe one third of what it is now. The ‘permanently on call’ logic of that era worked when there was a great deal of time off between patient contacts. Now there would be little. Streeting’s proposal would be enough to break any remaining commitment that GPs have to the NHS.

Second, there aren’t enough GPs to do this. Choice of this sort requires slack in the system so that an option between Dr A, B or C is available at any point in time. This inevitably implies some doctor down time during surgeries. There is, however, already no slack in the system. People can’t see any doctor right now, not just the one of their choice. And that is not the doctor’s fault. It is the consequence of a lack of funding, about which Streeting intends to do precisely nothing. In that case his proposal is, to use a medical term, dead on arrival.

Third, this proposal is intensely discriminatory. Most women would prefer to see a woman GP. Women consult GPs far more often than men. What Streeting is suggesting

is that women GPs should work much harder than men, which is both utterly unreasonable and would drive women GPs out of the NHS.

My guess is that Streeting consulted a focus group and a policy wonk, both of whom told him he had a great idea, before announcing this nonsense. All he actually proves by making such a claim is that he is as out of touch with the reality of GP practice in the NHS as Rachel Reeves is with the real needs of the economy.

It is distressing to see such incompetence on offer to the UK public when knowing that its purveyor is likely to be the next Health Secretary, where his failure is already guaranteed if he keeps taking nonsense of this sort.