Bring Hippocrates to the people and save the NHS

When Jeremy Hunt decided to take his children to A&E rather than wait for a GP appointment, or indeed, rather than making use of the out-of-hours GP service, he defended his decision with a speech that included an incredibly bleak assessment of the British people. His declaration that people could no longer tell what is urgent and what is not is tantamount to describing the population as a mass of unteachable buffoons. Perhaps Hunt is projecting when he sees the public as mindlessly staggering through life constantly posing a great danger to themselves and requiring a doctor to be within arm’s length at all times.

It seems he feels that the gene pool that gave us the industrial revolution has degenerated to such an extent that it is no longer possible to teach people that a sore throat is not an emergency but that crushing central chest pain is. Hunt’s response to this is to give the people what he deems they need, GPs available all day every day.

This response is shortsighted and risks entrapping the NHS in a vicious cycle of provision and demand. Increasing availability to the service will only serve to increase dependence. If we are deciding that people can’t decide for themselves what needs to a see a doctor and what does not, and what needs to be seen urgently and what does not, then surely we will need GPs available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Then we will need more GPs available 24 hours a day. Then what? The demand is potentially limitless, trying to keep up with it is not a long-term option but tackling it at source may be.

A cheaper and more sustainable solution would be to make a concerted and coordinated effort to educate people, ideally while they are at school.

REFERENCES

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