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A MESSAGE TO THE MEDICAL PROFESSION FROM THE MINISTER OF HEALTH

On July 5 we start, together, the new National Health Service. It has not had an altogether trouble-free gestation! There have been understandable anxieties, inevitable in so great and novel an undertaking. Nor will there be overnight any miraculous removal of our more serious shortages of nurses and others and of modern replanned buildings and equipment. But the sooner we start, the sooner we can try together to see to these things and to secure the improvements we all want.

On July 5 there is no reason why the whole of the doctor-patient relationship should not be freed from what most of us feel should be irrelevant to it, the money factor, the collection of fees or thinking how to pay fees—an aspect of practice already distasteful to many practitioners. Yet it has been vital, if this is to be the new situation, to see that it did not carry with it either any discouragement of professional and scientific freedom or any unfair worsening of a doctor's material livelihood. I sincerely hope and believe we have secured these things. If we have not we can easily put that right.

The picture I have always visualized is one, not of "panel doctoring" for the less well-off, not of anything charitable or demeaning, but rather of a nation deciding to make health-care easier and more effective by pooling its resources—each sharing the cost as he can through regular taxation and otherwise while he is well, and each able to use the resulting resources if and when he is ill. There is nothing of the social group or class in this; and I know you will be with me in seeing that there does not unintentionally grow up any kind of differentiation between those who use the new arrangements and those who, for any reason of their own, do not. Let this be a truly national effort. And I, for my part, can assure you that I shall want vigilantly to watch that your own intellectual and scientific freedom is never at risk of impairment by the background administrative framework, which has to be there for organizing purposes, but in which your own active participation is already secure.

In this comprehensive scheme—quite the most ambitious adventure in the care of national health that any country has seen—it will inevitably be you, and the other professions with you, on whom everything depends. My job is to give you all the facilities, resources, apparatus, and help I can, and then to leave you alone as professional men and women to use your skill and judgment without hindrance. Let us try to develop that partnership from now on.

It remains only to wish you all good luck, relief—as experience of the scheme grows—from your lingering anxieties, and a sense of real professional opportunity. I wish you them all, most cordially.

ANEURIN BEVAN.