Medical Innovation Bill

The list of bodies opposed to the Medical Innovation Bill is very long—the Academy for Healthcare Science, the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, the Academy of Medical Sciences, the Medical Research Council, the Wellcome Trust, Action Against Medical Accidents, the Association of Medical Research Charities, the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers, the British Medical Association, the British Pharmacological Society, Cancer Research UK, the Good Thinking Society, Healthwatch, the Medical Protection Society, the Medical Defence Union, the Motor Neurone Disease Association, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, the NHS Health Research Authority and the NHS Litigation Authority.

Richard Francis QC, one of our most respected national authorities on patient safety, opposes the legislation. I think that we ought to reflect carefully on his words:

“If there is misunderstanding then it should be corrected by guidance, not by legislation which exposes vulnerable patients to unjustified risk and deprives them of remedies when mistreated by those who have no acceptable justification for what they have done.”

Those are very serious words indeed. The legislation is also opposed by the Royal College of General Practitioners, the Royal College of Physicians, the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the Royal College of Radiologists. That is an important list.

There is a powerful lobby in favour of this legislation that purports that those who oppose it are somehow dinosaurs.

I urge the Minister to read the letter from 100 leading oncologists that was published in *The Times* on 13 November, which states:

“We devote our professional lives to treating patients with cancer and advancing research that contributes to finding more effective treatments for cancer. We neither want nor need Lord Saatchi’s bill. We do not believe that it will help our patients or future patients. We are dismayed that the bill is being promoted as offering hope to patients and their families when it will not make any meaningful difference to progress in treating cancer.

The law of medical negligence does not hinder our work or prevent innovation. There have been significant advances across all the modalities of cancer treatment over recent decades. There was no call for this change in the law from the medical profession. The current law already allows us to use off label drugs and to try new treatments when they are in patients’ best interests.

We are concerned that rather than promoting responsible scientific innovation in the treatment of cancer, the Medical Innovation Bill will actually encourage irresponsible experimentation producing nothing more than anecdotal ‘evidence’, at the potential expense of causing serious harm and suffering to patients, their families and carers. Innovation is best carried out within the discipline of controlled clinical trials, not by individual doctors acting on a whim.”

I think that sums it up well.