

Doctors lists

According to a recent press report some doctors' lists are out of date and inaccurate. This is worrying in itself, as doctors do need to know who they are responsible for and to whom they should provide treatment. It is also worrying for taxpayers, if it means that the NHS is paying doctors for patients who do not exist, or who have died, or who are counted twice by being on more than one list.

I raised the general issue recently about the delays and errors taking on board the death of an individual once it is properly reported to the state's very own Registrar. This is one more feature of the system. The Tell Us Once addition to Registration, or the act of registering itself, should trigger the automatic updating of the relevant GP's list. Individuals registering a death are asked to take in the dead person's NHS card, and the death is registered in full knowledge of their full name, address and National Insurance number. This should make updating the doctors records in an age of fast computers very easy.

When the Coalition looked at the topic of doctors lists in 2010 they estimated 2.8m patients registered in error.

Give free enterprise a chance

The Prime Minister usually includes in her big speeches praise for free enterprise. She appreciates that the Conservatives need to make the case for economic freedoms, for the role of profit and reward in driving investment and beneficial change, for a tax system which allows those who work hard and venture their own effort and money to keep sufficient of it, and for competitive markets which can serve customers well. She also knows that government does need to intervene to prevent monopoly and abuse of commercial power, and to ensure those who cannot easily compete are looked after or given better chances in life to do well.

In order to see these grand aims through, she needs to look at the balance of what government Ministers and officials are doing and saying. Government is coming across as keener to put taxes up and to find new taxes than to cut them, thanks to the Treasury. The government is ready to ban or regulate things they do not like, often in a good cause, but less forthcoming about how they can encourage or get out of the way of new ideas and better services and goods for the market that do not pose particular problems.

I have often commented on the damage done to the housing and car markets by higher taxes. There has also been the additional business rate burden imposed on some shops from the Business rate revaluation, at a time when traditional

shops need all the help they can get to compete with internet suppliers. The Treasury seems to want to tax new technology businesses more when the UK is good at them and is attracting many of the great world names here to grow and expand. Would a unilateral declaration of tax war on this sector be a good idea when many other countries would like those jobs and investments?

The decision to make larger shops charge 5p for a plastic bag has certainly changed behaviour and greatly reduced demand for plastic bags. The new sugar tax is designed to cut the output and sales of certain soft drinks, to be followed by a possible ban on selling energy drinks to young people to reduce sales and output of others. The sale of most old ivory in our successful auction houses has been banned, diverting that business abroad.

Rich Non Doms have been persuaded to leave by new tax rules, taking their money with them. Russia remains sanctioned with the UK leading the charge to toughen the regime against her more.

Many of these measures individually have a good cause or a good case behind them. The government, however, needs to be aware that if it appears that it bans and taxes parts of free enterprise where it thinks it does harm, and does not do the opposite for the many areas where it does good, it undermines the PM's support for the system itself. Much of what people like about their modern lives comes from the amazing dynamism of free enterprise, from the digital revolution it is pioneering and from entrepreneurial businesses whose owners and creators become very rich. People like today's smart phones, computer pads, streamed videos and film, the wide variety of entertainment on offer, modern cars and better appointed homes. Competitive markets give us these. The countries that do best are the ones that are most positive and helpful to the system that delivers so much progress.

Mr Macron's concentric circles

Mr Macron was misinterpreted by some this week who strain to discern an agreement between the EU and the UK in what he said. When Mr Macron stated he wanted reform of the EU he went back to the old idea of accelerated union and integration for an inner group. He then wants the UK to fit into an outer circle, where doubtless he thinks we should be rule takers. We would be grouped alongside eastern European countries who may want fuller integration but are not welcomed or thought to be ready by the elite countries to join the core of the Euro.

Mr Macron thinks France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg, five of the original six founders of the EU, and maybe Spain, are ready to move to a single budget, a single Finance Minister and a joint foreign and security policy. Italy would probably be told if they want to be part of this inner core they have to forget all their wishes to change the budget strategy and to bin their request to toughen migration and border controls. There

would be no room for dissenters in the core. The UK will of course be “offered” a security and defence partnership, because the UK provides more already to European defence than our GDP share would imply. The EU would like access to our two carrier groups and to the squadrons of F 35 fighter bombers, as well as to our Intelligence services. The EU has in mind some kind of Association Agreement with the UK, which is a watered down version of the EU Treaty without the voting rights and place at the table to complain in person about bad laws and bad policies.

Mr Macron’s vision is backward looking and out of time. Mrs Merkel is finding it very difficult to hold her coalition together, and will be in no position to offer a joint budget and common Finance Minister given the antipathy of German electors to the idea of Germany paying more and sponsoring a so called transfer union. As transfer unions are central to most countries with their own currencies this remains a major stumbling block for the Euro. Mrs Merkel’s traditional coalition partners, the CSU, face a difficult election in Bavaria in October, where they could lose control of their Lander Parliament thanks to AFD candidates. This means Mrs Merkel has to pose as tough on matters European and migratory for the next two months.

Mr Macron will also alienate many of the keen members of the EU that are excluded from his inner core. The countries to the south – or their governments – believe in the Euro scheme and were expecting a bit more financial and budget leeway. Instead Mr Macron seems to envisage more budget flex only for the chosen few that have passed the austerity test and joined the core. He will also continue to annoy the Hungarians and Poles who are the new naughty boys of the bloc, wanting the whole institution to adopt anti migrant policies.

It is going to prove a problematic few months for the EU, with Macron and Merkel in disagreement and with Italy pressing hard for changes to both migration and budget policies. Mrs Merkel usually gives in to pressure, so expect German policy to move to a more anti migrant stance.

Chancellor’s policy to hit the car market works

The Chancellor must have expected to see car output down by 11% this July compared to last July. He and his colleagues wanted to put people off buying diesels, and many have heeded his warnings. His higher VED hit the top end of the car market, and the threats of more taxes to come on both diesels and petrol vehicles has put people off buying. Reining in car loans was also part of the successful plan.

Over the year to date UK car output is down by 4.4%, with production for the home market down a massive 16% within that. Looking at new car registrations

in the UK we see diesel sales down 30% year to date compared to last year. This of course has nothing to do with Brexit, as all the alleged advantages of the EU trading system are still fully in place. This has been a car market collapse whilst still in the EU, created by domestic policies designed to cut demand for new cars.

The Motor manufacturers trade body says they need the continuation of “beneficial” EU trading arrangements to ensure growth in the future, without properly explaining why they have experienced such a big fall whilst enjoying these self same arrangements over the last year. They should instead be pressing for greater clarity on future car tax policies, and asking for some improvement in the present policy mix so UK people can afford to buy home produced vehicles in larger numbers again.

Encouraging more new cars and allowing more people to afford new cars should be good for the environment and for the economy. Modern cars are more fuel efficient with cleaner exhausts than most older cars. Governments usually want the car industry to do well.

I also see the latest consumer credit figures show a slowing there following authority’s instruction to rein in credit to slow the economy.

GDPR and Doctors

I have had a complaint from a local medical practice about the way the new EU General Data Regulation is working. Under its terms the surgery can no longer charge the administrative costs of supplying information to insurance companies or legal firms wishing to pursue claims against the NHS. As a result I am told the number of such requests has gone up, and the GPs are having to spend more of their time on this work and therefore less on treating patients. I have agreed to take this up with the government.