

Health Questions

Oral Answers

Tuesday 6th May 2008

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that children's health starts with a happy and successful birth, and that it therefore makes no sense at all for the Government to press primary care trusts all over country, including those in West Sussex, to close and diminish the number of maternity services, particularly at Princess Royal hospital in Haywards Heath—an area of exceptional growth with an enormous new population expected? It makes no sense whatever to downgrade valued and cherished maternity services at an excellent hospital.

Ann Keen MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health: The hon. Gentleman has raised this issue with me before in Adjournment debates in Westminster Hall, and he has campaigned strongly for his area. However, what is happening is not to downgrade but to improve. The Royal College of Midwives and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists would agree that we want children to have the best possible start in life, and the first few minutes are critical, for obvious reasons. As we know, this is happening with the consent of clinicians and the local community. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will continue to engage with his constituents on this important issue.