JAMES LANDALE:
Now this week’s report into the mistreatment of patients at the Mid-Staffordshire Hospital was by any standards scandalous; a culture of neglect and cruelty inflicted above all on the elderly. But how many of these patients should have been in hospital in the first place instead of getting care elsewhere? Tomorrow the government will announce, finally, how it is going to fund long-term care for the elderly, and the Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt is here to discuss it. Good morning, Secretary of State.

JEREMY HUNT:
Good morning, James.

JAMES LANDALE:
Your plans are out tomorrow. What are they? What have you agreed?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well I’m going to be announcing that to parliament tomorrow and you’ll understand I can’t pre-announce that on this show, much as that would be …
JAMES LANDALE:

(over) The principles.

JEREMY HUNT:

… a great pleasure for both of us. But I think the real point here is that we have a scandal at the moment that every year thirty to forty thousand people are having to sell their houses to pay for their care costs. Around 10 per cent of us end up paying more than £100,000 in care costs. And if you’ve got dementia, for example, which is going to affect a million people in the next few years, you have this double whammy that you’re trying to cope with this incredibly difficult condition - the loss of your memory, the impact on the relationships with your family - and then you have the double whammy of having to sell your home as well. And that’s what we want to sort out because you know as Conservatives, we want to help people who’ve done the right thing, who’ve worked hard and saved. This is a measure that will cost potentially a billion pounds a year at times when money is very, very short, but we’re doing it because it’s the right thing and we want to support the right people.

JAMES LANDALE:

The cap you’re going to propose - and I know you’re not going to give me numbers - will be higher than that recommended by the Dilnot Commission that originally looked at all of this. Why?

JEREMY HUNT:

Well I think there’s a misunderstanding about the cap because if you set the cap at £75,000, which is the number that the newspapers are talking about this morning, that’s not saying that we want everyone to pay £75,000 before the state helps. Actually we don’t want anyone to pay anything at all, and by setting an upper limit to how much people have to pay then it makes it possible for insurance companies to offer policies, for people to have options on their pensions, so that anything you have to pay under the cap is covered. And the big change here - and this is the really important reason why we’re thinking it’s the right thing to do and other governments have ducked this, but we’re putting put money into this - is because we need to change the culture in our country, so that just as people make provision for their pensions in their twenties, their thirties, they understand they need to make provision
for when they’re retired, so we also need to be a country where people prepare for their social care as well.

**JAMES LANDALE:**
But Dilnot set the cap much lower and as a result more people will have to pay more care than under the Dilnot proposals.

**JEREMY HUNT:**
Well, as I say, we’re going to have to wait until we announce that. But I think the point of the cap is actually to create the mechanism, so that people don’t have to pay anything at all. But let me also say that you know finances are very, very constrained at the moment and the fact that we are finding what might be as much as a billion pounds a year to do this shows that we want to help those hardworking people who’ve saved all their life and suddenly quite randomly find that their house is at risk, and we think that matters.

**JAMES LANDALE:**
You say it’s going to cost a billion pounds a year. How are you going to pay for that?

**JEREMY HUNT:**
Well I’m sorry to keep coming back, but I’ve been hauled before the Speaker before and I wouldn’t want that to happen again and so I don’t want to go into the details.

**JAMES LANDALE:**
Well …

**JEREMY HUNT:**
But let me just make this point because I know there’s been some speculation in the papers about inheritance tax as a potential way of paying for it. The point of what we’re doing is to protect people’s inheritance. The worst thing that can happen is at the most vulnerable moment in your life, you lose the thing that you worked hard for, that you’ve saved for - your own house - and what we’re trying to do is to be one of the first countries in the world which creates a system where people don’t end up having to sell their house.
JAMES LANDALE:
But you’re a member of a government that promised to raise the tax threshold, the inheritance tax threshold, up to a million pounds. You’re now going to freeze it for another few years. You know we’re back in death tax territory, aren’t we?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well let’s wait until tomorrow’s announcement. But if we announce tomorrow, as I want to do, a system that means that for the first time something that’s eluded governments for many, many years, which is that people can be confident their homes are safe and that if they have huge social care costs because of the growing … the nightmare of someone having dementia or whatever the reason is that their home is not at risk, then I think we’re protecting people’s inheritance and I think that’s something we will be able to be very, very proud of.

JAMES LANDALE:
And you’re also going to raise the amount of money that people can have as their assets, as their equity before they have to start paying. Some of the figures are over £100,000.

JEREMY HUNT:
Yes, I think that’s a very important other part of these proposals. At the moment you don’t get any help from the government at all if your house or any of your assets are worth more than £23,000; and what we want to do is to raise that because that really in today’s money is not a huge amount of money, and we want to raise that to a much larger sum, so that we can step in and help many, many more people.

JAMES LANDALE:
Many people say why don’t you start squeezing pensioner benefits to help pay for social care; that actually what people need is help with their social care, it’s not a free bus pass?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well we have looked at many different options. Tomorrow we’ll announce the option that we’ve settled on. But the point I would make is this - that what we’re going to
announce tomorrow is a fully funded solution. So we’re not going to do you know what we might have done, which is to say well we’re going to kick this into the long grass - we want to do it but we’re going to get a commission to pay for it - and actually I think the credibility of this system rests on a government being prepared to say we want this to happen and this is how we’re going to pay for it.

JAMES LANDALE:
Nick Clegg says in the newspapers this morning, “We will make sure no-one is forced to sell their home in their lifetime to pay for care.” Is that a firm, absolute commitment by this government?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well that is the objective of what I’m going to announce tomorrow.

JAMES LANDALE:
The objective is not a commitment.

JEREMY HUNT:
Well I think we’re playing with words here. Our commitment is to introduce a policy that means that people don’t have to sell their homes and you know I can’t …

JAMES LANDALE:
(over) But some still might?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well I don’t know the details of every single individual situation. But Nick Clegg in that article talks about the thirty to forty thousand people who do have to sell their homes. I think we have a solution that we’re going to announce tomorrow that takes the biggest worry that people have when they’re looking forward to their old age. Because the great thing about this issue is you don’t know if you’re going to be one of the one in ten people who might have to pay hundreds of thousands of pounds for your social care. It’s completely random. One in three of us get dementia, but we don’t know who that one in three is. And what this is trying to do is to create a system where you can spread that risk and actually be able to go into your old age knowing
that at least that one thing that you worry about most isn’t going to happen.

JAMES LANDALE:
We’ve waited for this for a long time. When is it actually going to happen?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well that’s what I’ll be announcing tomorrow, but it is going to be …

JAMES LANDALE:
But not his parliament?

JEREMY HUNT:
It’s going to be in a timescale that is not so far away that it seems impossible, but I won’t say any more than that.

JAMES LANDALE:
Okay. Let’s move onto Mid-Staffordshire. We’ve read this horrific report this week about just what went on there - more than a thousand people perhaps dying prematurely when they shouldn’t have done. This wasn’t a rogue unit, a rogue doctor, a rogue nurse. This was an entire institution and yet nobody seems to be held accountable for this.

JEREMY HUNT:
Well I agree and I’ve spent a lot of time talking in the last few weeks to the families of the people who suffered that appalling care and they feel very strongly that it is just wrong that something of this magnitude could happen and that no-one could be bought to book.

JAMES LANDALE:
So what are you going to do about it? You are Health Secretary.

JEREMY HUNT:
Indeed. And obviously as a politician, it’s not my job to say that this nurse is guilty and this nurse is not guilty, but I have asked the question of the professional
regulators whether they think the systems are right. But there’s something else in that report which is important because Robert Francis says that the thing he doesn’t want to happen is for ministers to say well it’s all the fault of this person or that person and if Person X hadn’t been doing Job Y at a particular time, this problem wouldn’t have happened.

JAMES LANDALE:
Why not?

JEREMY HUNT:
Because he says, just as you said at the beginning, that this is a cultural problem. That we have developed a system inside the NHS where for all its virtues - and I do want to make this point, James - for all its virtues we say that what counts is what’s counted. And actually some of the most important things … George Orwell says “you can obey all the small rules and break the biggest rule of all”, and the biggest rule of all is that the NHS and the people in the NHS want to look after people with dignity and respect and we have a …

JAMES LANDALE:
(over) No, sorry, hang on a minute. There were people who did this. They were managers, they were doctors, they were nurses. They are the people who are responsible for what happened. Yes there may be systemic failings across the piece, but there are also individuals who actually were responsible for this neglect; and yet the public out there, people sitting at home are saying nobody seems to be held to account for this.

JEREMY HUNT:
Well I agree - that is one of the most shocking things about this - and that’s why if you read the papers this morning, you see the General Medical Council saying they’re looking at whether doctors should be held to account and I’ve written to the Nursing and Midwifery Council about this as well. And I think this is a problem. I think accountability is very, very important.

JAMES LANDALE:
So you want people to be struck off - to cease to be nurses, cease to be doctors, cease to be managers if they’re responsible for this?

JEREMY HUNT:
Absolutely. And you know the question I ask as Health Secretary is why is it that we have a system where potentially a thousand people have lost their lives because of bad care and no-one’s bought to book. But I also don’t want to make the mistake of thinking that this is all about bad apples. I mean… last week, for example, I heard the story of a nurse who was saying that to admit someone to trauma, she had to fill out a twenty-two page form and then ten other forms after that. And what we have at the moment is a system where the people in it want to do the right thing, but the bureaucracy is so complex, the hoops they have to jump through … There’s a major London hospital, for example, that said …

JAMES LANDALE:
(over) But …

JEREMY HUNT:
This is important. A major London hospital said that in the space of just over a year they had forty-three assessments and inspections by twenty-four different bodies. And what we’ve created is a system where the definition of success for a hospital is the boxes you tick, whether you meet you’re A&E targets, the number of hips you replace, but it’s not the thing that matters most of all, which is how you look after the people who walk through the door, and that’s what we have to change.

JAMES LANDALE:
That culture still exists, it’s still there. You have kept many of Labour’s targets. You’ve kept them on. You’ve tweaked them, but they’re still there. So what guarantee can you give as Health Secretary that what happened in Mid-Staffordshire won’t happen again?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well what the Prime Minister announced on Wednesday is a very fundamental change in the way that we assess what the definition of success is for a hospital. And what he
JAMES LANDALE:
But you’ve just said there are too many inspectors.

JEREMY HUNT:
Yeah. No, no, but … Well I’m going to be announcing this week how we’re going to tackle the bureaucracy that is at the heart of this problem. But the most important thing is that when we say whether a hospital is good or whether it’s failing, the amount of listening it does to patients - whether it puts patients first - has to be one of the most important things that’s being assessed, and that will create a really important change. And what we have to do - this is really about freeing up people on the front line who actually want … who went into the NHS because they want to help people at their most vulnerable, but all too often find that they have a system that makes it impossible to do that.

JAMES LANDALE:
But what is this? Is the solution to this more criminal offences, changing the way people are trained, regulating more healthcare assistance, closing down hospitals? You know what is the real nub of what Francis is recommending, that the government is going to actually do?

JEREMY HUNT:
Okay, well I think there’s three things. First of all, we have to recognise that some of the most important things can’t be measured and we need a system that gives people on the frontline the room to actually care for people. And you know whether a nurse depresses people on the ward because he or she has a bad attitude or lights up a whole ward because of their sunny disposition, you know those things can’t always be measured and we need to give people that room at the front line. That’s the first thing. The second thing is we need to make sure when we’re assessing how well hospitals do that quality of care is paramount, and at the moment that’s not how we define the success of hospitals. And I think the third thing - and this is the other thing that Robert Francis talked about - is we have to make sure that when we have problems in a system, the establishment is not able to close ranks. You don’t have a system where
the professionals know that something’s going wrong. Robert Francis talked about more than fifty different early warning signals that were ignored. We don’t want that and so the public have a right to know, just as much as the insiders, how well their local hospital is doing, and that’s something big that we need to change.

JAMES LANDALE:
Just one final point on Mid-Staffordshire. The man responsible for the health authority for Mid-Staffordshire, Sir David Nicholson, is now in charge of the NHS. Why is he still in his post?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well Robert Francis said that to find a scapegoat and to say …

JAMES LANDALE:
(over) No, sorry … no forgive me.

JEREMY HUNT:
(over) No you’re not letting me answer.

JAMES LANDALE:
A scapegoat takes the sins of others. We’re talking about people who were responsible taking responsibility for what they did.

JEREMY HUNT:
But David Nicholson didn’t run the hospital. David Nicholson was at the strategic helm…

JAMES LANDALE:
(over) Francis said …

JEREMY HUNT:
(over) James, you’re not letting me answer the question.

JAMES LANDALE:
(over) Franc… No, no, no. Sorry, Robert Francis said that “Sir David’s health authority did not put patient safety at the forefront of its work. It explained away concerns about high mortality rates.” That’s quotes from him.

JEREMY HUNT:
What he also said is that he does not want people to be fired as a response to this and for people to say that the way we’ll solve this problem is because if we had a different person doing that job at a particular time, this problem wouldn’t have happened. And that is to make the problem smaller than it is. This is a very, very big problem about the overall ethos in the NHS where we’ve created structures that make it difficult for people to do what they went into the NHS to do. Now in terms of the performance of individuals, we need much more accountability and we need structures that hold individuals to account.

JAMES LANDALE:
Okay.

JEREMY HUNT:
But my job as Health Secretary is to make sure that the structures we have in place, the culture in the service means that this can never happen again.

JAMES LANDALE:
In light of all of this, why should health spending be protected from cuts?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well I think it's a misnomer to say that health is getting off lightly.

JAMES LANDALE:
(over) I’m not saying. I’m saying …

JEREMY HUNT:
(over) No, no … No well let me answer the question. Because demand on the health service because of our ageing population is actually going up by 4 per cent a year, so we’ve protected the funding in real terms but we’re doing nearly half a million more
operations year in, year out than we were doing just two years ago. So in order to fund that extra demand, we are having to make very, very big efficiencies.

**JAMES LANDALE:**
Can you guarantee the health spending will be protected in the current spending review for the first year of the next parliament?

**JEREMY HUNT:**
Well that is a matter for the chancellor and the government. But all I’d say is that this government has nailed its colours to the mast. We believe the NHS matters and we care passionately about the service it provides …

**JAMES LANDALE:**
Yeah.

**JEREMY HUNT:**
… and we’ve protected spending in very, very difficult circumstances.

**JAMES LANDALE:**
How confident are you that no hospitals are serving horse meat?

**JEREMY HUNT:**
Well all hospitals have a responsibility to make sure that the food they’re serving is safe. We don’t believe at the moment that there are public safety issues. There may be fraud issues in terms of people eating something that isn’t what the label on the tin says it is, but all hospitals need to make absolutely sure that …

**JAMES LANDALE:**
Have you asked them to make sure?

**JEREMY HUNT:**
Well they have that responsibility and I’m very confident they are, and I’m liaising with Owen Paterson who’s talking to the Food Standards Agency to make sure. As I say, at the moment we don’t think there’s a safety issue. If there were, then that would
be obviously a very serious concern. But we do think there’s a consumer fraud issue or there may be a consumer fraud issue and that’s what Owen’s research is establishing.

JAMES LANDALE:
Final question. Can you tell me a bit about the state of your party. Your Prime Minister has promised a referendum on the EU, he’s managed to persuade the rest of Europe to cut their budget, and yet at the same time there’s more talk about leadership speculation, your party is deeply unhappy about the gay marriage vote. Doesn’t this just show that David Cameron and other modernisers like yourself are just not at one with the rest of your party?

JEREMY HUNT:
I became a Conservative over twenty years ago because I believe we need to have a party that is going to face up to the tough and difficult decisions in the long-term interests of the country and I don’t believe that other parties do that. And if you look at the record of David Cameron in coalition with the Liberal Democrats, you have a party that’s taken profoundly difficult decisions on dealing with the deficit, incredibly difficult decisions on reforming the welfare state, on reforming the education system, and now what we’re talking about this morning - making some very big changes in health. And I think that’s something we can be proud of. That’s what we Conservatives do. It’s not popular, it’s difficult, we’re always behind in the mid-term - that was the same in the 1980s and 90s - but when it comes to a General Election, what the country want to know is did this team of people face up to the challenges because in the end what will make this country great going forward is to have governments that do rise to those very, very difficult challenges.

JAMES LANDALE:
So you’ve got no qualms about the parties being split about this?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well it’s never easy making changes like this. This was a free vote. If you’re talking about gay marriage, it’s a matter of conscience. What the Prime Minister could have done is ducked this issue - said this is one for the back drawer, this is one for another
time. But he didn’t and I think that showed …

JAMES LANDALE:
(over) Could it cost …

JEREMY HUNT:
(over) … the courage that you know we know that he has.

JAMES LANDALE:
Could it cost you Eastleigh, as Tim Montgomerie was suggesting?

JEREMY HUNT:
Well that will be a close fought election and let’s see, but I think those voters in Eastleigh will take the big view.

JAMES LANDALE:
Great. Jeremy Hunt, Health Secretary, thank you very much indeed.

INTERVIEW ENDS