

BOOTH HALL CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

Manchester Area Health Authority (Teaching) North District

CHARLESTOWN ROAD,

BLACKLEY,

MANCHESTER,

M9 2AA.

Neurosurgical Unit

Tel: 061-795 7000

CMB/VLT

26 May 1981

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Mrs M Thatcher
10 Downing Street
Whitehall
Westminster
London W1

Dear Mrs Thatcher

I take the liberty of writing to you, for I believe I must. I have just visited the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast to give a lecture. I am a Neurosurgeon and as is customary, my Northern Irish colleagues took me on a tour of their wards.

It was inevitable that I should see the children who have recently been injured by plastic bullets. I am sure you are aware of the extent and severity of the injuries that these missiles are inflicting on the brains of the under 15's.

Forgive me for repeating a few well known facts about the brain and skull. The brain is unable to regenerate itself, so any loss of substance leaves a permanent deficit. The brain has a soft consistency and is considerably damaged by violent shaking. The skull of a child is easily shattered and penetrated by a hard object travelling at speed. A plastic bullet striking the head of a child not only penetrates the skull, driving small fragments of bone into the substance of the brain, but it also causes considerable local tissue deformation.

In addition, it violently shakes the brain as a whole, leading to widespread brain damage, which is followed within hours by swelling. This in turn, is followed by further brain damage. Survivors not only have a high probability of being permanently paralysed down one side of the body, but they are also likely to have intellectual and personality changes. Some will probably be so disabled, that it would have been better if they had not survived at all.

It goes without saying that relatives of these children are greatly distressed, but it seemed to me that the medical and nursing staff were also being deeply affected and were extremely depressed by the presence of so many severely injured and pathetically young patients in their wards.

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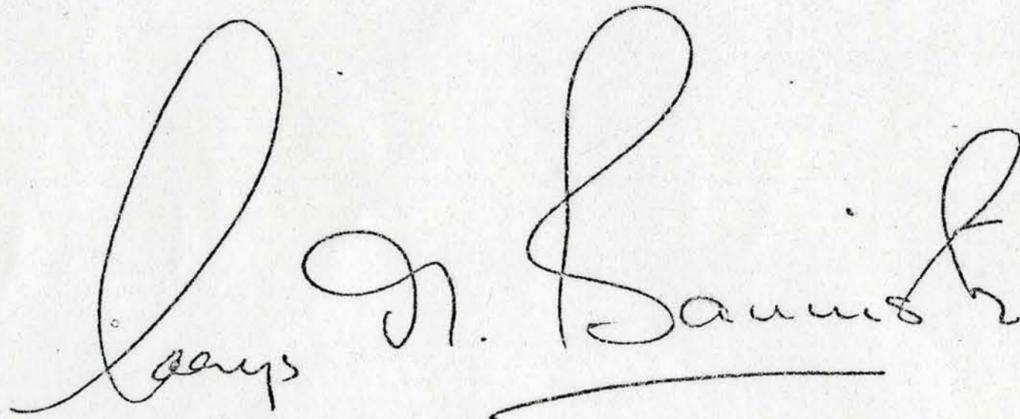
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I can not believe that it is beyond the ingenuity of the security forces to devise a less dangerous means of deterring these youngsters. Please persuade them to give this matter their most urgent consideration.

However much one condemns the actions of these children, one can not condone the injuries they are receiving.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "C M Bannister". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

C M Bannister (Miss)
Consultant Neurosurgeon