

Brexit and health care for UK citizens: an executive summary

Summary: Ed Wilson

Brexit risks an NHS staffing crisis

The NHS relies heavily on EU nationals to work in hospitals, GP surgeries and as paramedics. Over one in 20 (5.6%) of the entire NHS workforce in England is from one of the EU27. Since the referendum in 2016, the NHS has lost staff from other EU countries as a result of factors including falling value of salaries based on GBP, a feeling of unwelcomeness and anxiety about future rights to live and work in the UK. Between October 2016 and September 2017, 4067 EU nurses and midwives left the Nursing and Midwifery Council register. The King's Fund, an independent healthcare charity, believes that the departure of EU staff as a result of Brexit is exacerbating an NHS staffing crisis.

The costs of drugs will go up, resulting in less money elsewhere

A catastrophic no-deal Brexit is still a genuine threat if Boris Johnson fails to agree a trade agreement with the EU27 by the end of the transition period (December 2020). In this scenario, the Nuffield Trust estimate that drug costs to the NHS will increase by £2.3 billion per year. This is a gratuitous waste of funding that could be used to fund staff and life-saving equipment. £2.3 billion is the equivalent of 69,000 average annual salaries for nurses or 2,600 MRI scanners.

Stop Brexit for free health care for UK citizens travelling in Europe

All UK citizens are eligible for a European Health Insurance Card, which entitles them to free or reduced health care when travelling within the European Union. This right is threatened by Brexit, and requires the UK government to make individual arrangements with member states. However, as recently as October, agreements had been reached with only three countries: Spain, Portugal and Ireland. At the moment, UK citizens who fall ill in the other 24 EU member states will have to pay for healthcare or use travel insurance. Stopping Brexit will secure the right to free healthcare for all UK citizens travelling in Europe.

We will lose funding and knowledge

Between 2007 and 2013, the UK received €8.8 billion of EU funding for research, development and innovation activities, while contributing only €5.4 billion. Part of this money is used for medical research, a sector in which the UK aspires to be a world

leader. Restrictions on the freedom of researchers from the UK and other member states to work freely across the EU is a barrier to this vital work. Preserving freedom of movement by remaining in the EU helps to foster research collaboration, leading to new medical insights and innovations.