



European health community calls on the EU and UK to prioritise patients as crunch Article 50 decision approaches

Today a group of organisations representing patients, healthcare professionals and the health care industry have called on the EU and UK to prioritise patients in the Brexit negotiations.

To coincide with the EPSCO Council of EU Health Ministers in Brussels, this policy statement comes just one week ahead of the crunch European Council meeting where negotiators will decide if the Article 50 negotiations can move beyond ‘phase 1’. It is important to move to the second phase of the negotiations as quickly as possible and agree on an adequate transition period and future cooperation after March 2019.

The document outlines five priorities, which the group says will ‘determine the risk in Brexit’s impact on patients and public health across Europe’.

These priorities are:

- Bring close cooperation between the EU and UK on the regulation of medicines and medical technologies, to ensure that UK and EU patients will continue to have access to life-saving medicines and medical technologies.
- Establish a common framework for collaboration in research and information sharing between the EU27 and the UK.
- Ensure that there are continued reciprocal healthcare arrangements between the EU and UK.
- Develop strong coordination between the EU and UK on public health, including in pandemic preparation and disease prevention programmes.
- Ensure EU and UK health professionals continue to benefit from mutually beneficial training and education opportunities, with automatic recognition of qualifications.

Speaking in response to the policy statement, **Nicola Bedlington, Secretary General of the European Patients Forum** said:

‘As Health Ministers from across Europe meet today in Brussels, it is critical that they send a clear message that the EU and UK must prioritise patients in the Brexit negotiations. A disorderly Brexit has the potential to have a very negative impact on patient health across Europe. Negotiators from both the EU and the UK have a responsibility do everything they can to avoid this risk.’

This policy statement comes following the publication of data from the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA), which indicates that each month 45 million patient packs of medicine moves from the UK to the EU27/EEA, with 37 million patient

packs going in the other direction¹. Members of the group have also called for appropriate transitional arrangements to be put in place to ensure that European patients can continue to access their medicines without disruption.

Nathalie Moll, Director General of the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA) added:

“The life sciences sector in the EU and UK are completely aligned in seeking future cooperation on the regulation and supply of medicines and medical technologies in the Brexit negotiations. We’ve been working since the day following the UK’s decision to leave the EU to share our expertise and views on the specific issues the healthcare sector may face on ‘day 1’ of Brexit with policy makers on both sides of the Channel. We urge negotiators on both sides to move to the second phase as quickly as possible and agree on an adequate transition period and future cooperation after March 2019. If not addressed in an appropriate and timely manner, the integrated nature of supply chains for medicines and medical technologies across Europe, and the shared regulatory framework, mean that Brexit will affect the supply, regulatory system and the monitoring of medicines and medical technologies for patients across the EU.”

Serge Bernasconi, CEO of MedTech Europe said:

“Medical technologies help save and transform people’s lives across the whole continuum of care. The ongoing Brexit negotiations should seek to avoid any risks to patients and their continued access to needed diagnostics and medical devices caused by the disruption of the supply chain or the region’s regulatory convergence.”

Alexander Natz, Secretary General of EUCOPE said:

“Small and mid-sized pharmaceutical companies provide innovative products to millions of patients in Europe. To ensure that European patients, and especially the most vulnerable among them such as those suffering from rare conditions, continue to benefit from medical innovations, it is imperative that uncertainty is minimised throughout the Brexit negotiations and as much continuity as possible in the regulatory process between EU-27 and the UK is ensured.”

Hubertus Craz, Director General of AESGP:

“Self-care products are often the first choice when European citizens face a health issue. Brexit negotiations should make sure that their availability in the UK and the EU are not hampered and that the UK authorities stay in the EU regulatory system as much as possible.”

¹ <https://www.efpia.eu/news-events/the-efpia-view/statements-press-releases/09112017-efpia-survey-underlines-the-importance-of-action-on-medicines-to-prevent-patients-being-put-at-risk-as-a-result-of-brexit/>