

European health community issues key questions Article 50 negotiations must answer for patients and public health

The European Health Community has warned that time is running out to secure patients' interests in Brexit negotiations. With Phase 2 of the negotiations looming, health groups across Europe have drawn up a list of crucial unanswered questions that must be answered by the EU and UK negotiators to 'put patients first' in the negotiations.

These questions were set out at a meeting of a Coalition of Brussels based health stakeholders on 21 February and have been released in advance of the European Council meeting on 22 March, where the guidelines for the negotiation of phase 2 will be agreed. These focus on how to prioritise patient safety and public health in the Article 50 negotiations on the future relationship between the UK and the EU. Each speaker posed three questions of importance which will need resolving for patients.

The Group has now published this document in light of the discussions by the EU27 on the draft guidelines for the future relationship between the UK and EU in the weeks to come. Some of the key questions the Coalition sets out are:

- How will a trade agreement ensure sufficient and timely supply of medicines and medical devices for both EU and UK patients?
- In the event of a 'no deal' Brexit, how would EU27 national governments avoid that public health be affected across the EU?
- How will the UK and the EU come to an agreement to ensure the future drug licensing system does not exacerbate delays in access to the most innovative treatments for patients, both in the UK and across the EU?
- How can EU and UK patients benefit from the pooling of scarce expertise in rare and complex diseases under European Reference Networks?

This follows on from the publication of a policy statement by the same group in December 2017¹. The document outlined 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.

¹ <http://www.eu-patient.eu/globalassets/library/publications/brexit--prioritising-patients---final.pdf>



Nicola Bedlington, General Secretary, European Patients Forum

“Brexit has great implications in various areas, public health, patient safety, access to medicine and medical devices, research and many others. This is so, not only for patients residing in the UK, but also in the rest of the EU(27). When it comes to those areas relevant to healthcare, patients’ interest should be shaping the agenda of both sides of the negotiating parties”