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For further information on any of these news items, please contact Paul Laffin: plaffin@bma.org.uk

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Brexit Update

With the future of Brexit dependent upon the outcome of the forthcoming UK general election, we continue to work to ensure that key European decision makers are fully cognisant of the fact that, as per our [Manifesto for Health](https://www.bma.org.uk/policy/manifesto-for-health), “a no-deal Brexit will have damaging consequences for patients, the health workforce, health services, medical research and medical education across the UK and Europe.” Accordingly, and ahead of Croatia’s assumption – January/June 2020 – of the Presidency of the Council of the EU, Dr Chaand Nagpaul, the BMA’s Chair of Council, has written to the Croatian Health Minister to “echo our European partners’ call for the delivery of pragmatic solutions which permit the ongoing provision of high-quality healthcare across the continent”.

In addition, and with a view to what the regulatory framework for medical professionals within the future relationship might entail, Paul Laffin, our EU Public Affairs Manager, presented to the [CEOM’s](https://www.ceom.eu/) Plenary session. A copy of Dr Nagpaul’s letter is available upon request, with further details about our extensive work on this key issue available [here](https://www.bma.org.uk).  

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Europe’s Junior Doctors United Whatever the Outcome of Brexit

With BMA member, Dr Kitty Mohan’s, Presidency of the [EJD (European Junior Doctors’ Association)](https://www.ejd-ard.org/), drawing to a close, delegates at its General Assembly voted unanimously to adopt a motion – proposed by the Irish Medical Organisation – which stated:

> In order to maintain good relationships and to exchange good practice in medical training and the delivery of healthcare, the British Medical Association will remain on as a full member of EJD irrespective of the outcome of Brexit.

With the BMA’s future within EJD now secured, and with BMA member, Dr Ellen McCourt, elected as Chair of its Medical Workforce Committee, we can now prioritise efforts to tackle those issues – like “burnout” – threatening Europe’s junior doctors.
BMA Highlights Brexit Dangers to New EU Commissioners

Following their approval by the European Parliament (EP) earlier this month, BMA Chair, Dr Chaand Nagpaul, has written to the three new EU Commissioners for Health, Research, and the Internal Market, stressing the multifaceted challenges that Brexit poses for public health and healthcare systems across the EU27.

In his letter to the new Commissioner for Health, Stella Kyriakides, the BMA Chair highlighted:

> Brexit risks threatening Europe’s ability to address the global health threats posed by antimicrobial resistance and vaccine hesitancy – both of which you have already acknowledged as top priorities for your new team. Infectious diseases do not stop at borders. Nor can successful health security and protection systems be established by a single government. The effectiveness of collaborative work across a region will be limited if there is no agreement on areas of action between countries within the region.

Dr Nagpaul further reiterated the need for a continued coordinated UK-EU approach to emergency preparedness strategies, risk assessment, management, communication and policy research in order to avoid undermining Europe’s capacity to respond to serious health threats.

In his letter to the Bulgarian Commissioner Mariya Gabriel, who will lead the Research portfolio, the BMA Chair highlighted the many ways Brexit is likely to impact on the ability of the European medical profession to train the next generations of doctors, and their subsequent development of future devices and techniques through collaborative research and clinical trials.

The BMA Chair went on to urge that any UK-EU future partnership must facilitate an innovation agreement between the EU and UK for research programmes; including full researcher mobility between the UK and the rest of Europe, continued UK participation in Erasmus, Horizon Europe, and the European Investment Bank, as well as a mutual recognition agreement for regulations that support science.

French nominee Thierry Breton, the new Commissioner for the Internal Market, was one of the last candidates to be approved by the EP. Writing to the new Commissioner, the BMA Chair emphasised that the current system of mutual recognition of professional qualifications plays a crucial role in facilitating cross-border working, fostering doctors’ professional development and meeting various workforce requirements across Europe.

Finally, he stressed the importance of the UK’s continued involvement in the EU system of sharing fitness to practise alerts, via the (IMI) internal market information system.

Barring a legal decision on the UK government’s refusal to nominate a UK Commissioner in light of the latest Brexit extension, the new EU Commission will formally take up its roles in the beginning of December. Once in place, the BMA’s European Office will be working to ensure that they are fully cognisant of the risks that Brexit poses to Europe’s health and the pragmatic solutions required to deal with them.

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Developing Policy for Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare

Following a high-level exchange of views – which centred on the Expert Group’s recent publication, Ethics Guidelines to promote “Trustworthy AI” – on the ethics of AI (Artificial Intelligence) in the EP’s Legal Affairs Committee, the BMA’s partner, the CPME (Standing Committee of European Doctors) adopted a revised position paper on the topic at its General Assembly which:

- **Calls for integration of the physicians’ perspective into the process of health care AI design and development and professional oversight over AI clinical validation and usefulness once it is applied in health care delivery. Physicians should be represented in the relevant advisory bodies at EU and national level.**

- **Calls for a sound, evidence-based implementation of AI with proven benefits for health care providing improvement in quality of care or lowering use of resources.**

- **Calls for enhancing digital literacy of medical students, professionals and patients. CPME recommends the inclusion of AI in medical curricula and continuing medical education.**
• Calls for transparent, explicable and trustable health care AI being understandable for physicians.

• Calls for maintaining a high level of health data protection, patients’ privacy and medical confidentiality which are at risk with the application of new technologies.

• Calls for addressing a risk of potential bias and discrimination which can be prompted by health care AI training on existing, imperfect human-made data.

• Calls for systematic quality checks to be established and performed to secure safety and precision of AI outputs throughout the lifecycle of an AI tool and for enabling physicians to enrich data pools with AI supporting semantic annotations enhancing their quality and usability.

With the EC likely to propose new legislation in this burgeoning area, the BMA European Office will continue to work with its European partners to ensure that it reflects the interests of the European medical profession.

Wales to Introduce Minimum Unit Pricing for Alcohol
Following the EC’s consideration of the legislative proposal, the National Assembly for Wales has now approved regulations to introduce a minimum unit price for alcohol of 50p, to be brought in as of 2nd March 2020.
The new law follows the introduction of the scheme in Scotland and supports the Welsh Government’s wider work to reduce harmful and hazardous drinking by tackling the availability and affordability of cheap, strong alcohol. Researchers estimate the new measures will result in 66 fewer deaths and 1,281 fewer hospital admissions in Wales per year, saving the Welsh NHS more than £90 million over 20 years in direct healthcare costs.
Accordingly, and in line with our previous efforts to help secure MUP’s introduction in Scotland, we will be working with European partners such as the European Alcohol Alliance (EUROCARE) to ease its passage into the law and to ensure that the views of the medical profession are given precedence over those of the alcohol industry.

Tackling Climate Change in a Post-Brexit Europe
Working on the premise that that the UK will continue to contribute and participate in its implementation until the end of the proposed 2020 transition period, the three EU institutions came to an agreement on the EU’s budget for 2020, amounting to €322.26 billion.
With a larger proportion of this year’s funds (21%) committed to tackling climate change – which will self-evidently require an ongoing pan-European response whatever Brexit might hold – the BMA’s efforts to lead the medical profession’s response to this challenge should be noted.
In addition to the 2019 ARM’s (Annual Representative Meeting) declaration of a climate emergency and commitment to campaign for carbon neutrality by 2030, the BMA coordinated an urgent resolution, unanimously adopted at the 2019 WMA General Assembly, which declared a climate emergency and called for greater recognition of the role of health professionals in advocating for climate action and the environmental impact of the healthcare sector. Likewise, in Europe, the BMA has been actively involved in the formulation of the CPME’s latest position paper on climate change and air pollution.
Whatever the outcome of Brexit, the BMA will continue to work with both our European and international partners to ensure the association plays a key role in a coordinated international effort to tackle the climate crisis.