Brexit Update

With the nature - departing with or without a deal - of Brexit still in the balance, the BMA continues to work on both fronts to ensure that, whatever the outcome, the impact upon the European medical profession and its patients is mitigated.

Accordingly, and with the EC (European Commission) publishing further “No Deal” contingency planning documents, the BMA has published A health service on the brink: the dangers of a no deal Brexit which details the damaging consequences for patients, the health workforce and health services across the UK and Europe.

Having discussed this material with MEPs from across the EU 27, we welcomed the EP’s (European Parliament) adoption of a resolution on the state of play of the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union which echoes many of our objectives:

- Expresses its grave concern that recent and conflicting announcements by the Home Office in relation to free movement after 31 October 2019 have generated very unhelpful uncertainty for EU citizens resident in the UK, with the risk that those announcements may exacerbate the hostile environment towards them as well as impacting negatively on their ability to enforce their rights
- Indicates that it would support an extension of the period provided for in Article 50 if there are reasons and a purpose for such an extension (such as to avoid a ‘no-deal exit’, to hold a general election or a referendum, to revoke Article 50, or to approve a withdrawal agreement) and that the work and functioning of the EU institutions are not adversely affected

In addition, and following on from our engagement (see July 2019 edition) with our partners in the CPME (Standing Committee of European Doctors) regarding the mutual recognition of professional qualifications in a “no deal” scenario, we have learned from our partners in the Polish Supreme Chamber of Physicians and Dentists that the Polish government’s planned no deal “system may be seen as an additional barrier to this.” Recognising the difficulties that this would also pose to UK medical students seeking to work in Poland, the Polish Supreme Chamber has committed to contacting “the Minister of Health (to) ask him analyze a possibility to initiate an amendment of the law at least as far as medical doctors and dentists are concerned.”

As ratification of the draft withdrawal agreement remains possible ahead of the 31 October deadline, and would lead to negotiations on the exact nature of the future relationship between the UK and EU27, we
continue to engage with key decision makers on both sides of the channel in order to ensure that they remain cognisant of our members’ concerns.

Accordingly, Dr Chaand Nagpaul, Chair of UK Council, wrote with Dr Padraig McGarry, President of the IMO (Irish Medical Organisation) to Mairead McGuinness, MEP for the border region in Ireland and 1st Vice-President of the EP (European Parliament), to advise her of the:

*over 3000 Irish qualified doctors in the UK and 777 UK qualified doctors in Ireland, (who) can practise in both jurisdictions, as well as in other member states, due to the mutual recognition of professional medical qualifications (MRPQ) and the principle of free movement.*

And how, “in addition to facilitating such cross-border working, these principles play a crucial role in both doctors’ professional development and in helping to meet various workforce requirements in both Ireland and further afield.”

They conclude by reaffirming their view ‘which is shared both by the European Council and the UK government that the future partnership should include ambitious provisions on movement of natural persons...in areas such as (the) recognition of professional qualifications.”

Copies of the aforementioned letter are available upon request with further details about our extensive work on this key issue available [here](#).

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**Renewed EU Efforts to Tackle Vaccine Hesitancy**

Several BMA representatives attended the Global Vaccine Summit which took place this month in Brussels. At the summit, the EC and (WHO) World Health Organization stressed the role of vaccine hesitancy in the recent measles outbreak, which led to four countries, including the UK, losing their measles elimination status in 2018. The Summit concluded with the announcement of a [10-point plan](#) to improve access to vaccines and to eliminate vaccine-preventable diseases.

Part of this plan has involved establishing a Coalition for Vaccination, which brings together EU healthcare professional and student associations, including several BMA representatives, and is co-chaired by BMA’s European Partner, CPME. The new Coalition will work on exchanging best practice in vaccination delivery and coordinating the dissemination of accurate information to the public in order to combat myths. Following the Summit, the Coalition published its [first joint statement](#), in which they reaffirmed the safety and efficacy of vaccination. The BMA will continue to work closely with this new Coalition and to contribute to its work at every available opportunity.

The Coalition’s statement came shortly after the EP announced plans to carry out an in-depth study into vaccine safety. The study is a response to several petitions received by the EP from Italian anti-vaccination campaigners, who have argued that the exclusion of non-vaccinated children from Italian schools is discriminatory. The BMA and its European partners have previously condemned moves from Italy’s governing vaccine-sceptic Five Star Party to sack the scientific board of the government, which provides advice and guidance on vaccine safety.

We will be monitoring the evolution of this study, and, along with our European partners, including those in the Coalition for Vaccination, will continue to support any EU effort to tackle growing rates of vaccine hesitancy across the continent.

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**Brewing Industry Commits to Coming Clear on Calories**

The European beer lobby has become the second EU alcohol lobby to pledge to provide calorie information on their labels.

The Brewers of Europe formalised the commitment by signing a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) in Brussels in the presence of the outgoing EU Health Commissioner.
The Memorandum commits the industry to providing per 100ml calorie information on their labels by 2022 and follows a similar proposal by the Spirits of Europe lobby earlier this year. The new pledge is the latest response from the alcohol industry to the EC’s request for a self-regulatory, industry-wide proposal to ensure consumers are informed of the ingredients and calorie content of alcoholic beverages. However, to date, the beer lobby is the only sector of the alcohol industry which has agreed to provide a full ingredient list on their labels. The BMA has consistently joined its EU partners in calling on policy makers to close the alcohol industry’s special exemption from nutritional labelling requirements, and to ensure that there is a harmonised regulatory approach to address this loophole. We will continue to work with our EU partners to ensure that the EU institutions are fully cognisant of the health benefits of nutritional labelling of alcoholic beverages and the importance of the EU developing its alcohol policies completely independently of the alcohol industry.

New Commission Team Unveiled with Doctor and Patient Advocate Given Health Portfolio
Incoming EC President, Dr Ursula Von Der Leyen, has unveiled her slate of nominees, together with their respective portfolios, for the new Commission team she hopes to lead from November onwards. The candidates will face questioning by the EP and must be approved by a vote before taking up their new roles. The first female Commission President has not hesitated to shake things up; introducing a near-perfect gender balance, with many of the top posts held by women. She has also created a range of new portfolio assignments including “Crisis Management” (Janez Lenarčič: Slovenia), “Values and Transparency” (Vera Jourova: Czech Republic) and “Democracy and Demography” (Dubravka Šuica: Croatia). Through the portfolios assigned to her Vice Presidents, she has also signalled what she sees to be the most pressing policy challenges for today’s European Union. The role of her top Vice President (Frans Timmermans; Netherlands) will be dedicated to fighting climate change and introducing a “European Green Deal”; while another Vice President (Magrethe Vestager; Denmark) will be tasked with making “Europe fit for the digital age” and taking on the US digital behemoths. Von der Leyen also seemed to send a pointed message to the UK by nominating Phil Hogan (Ireland) as the EU’s new Trade Commissioner. This makes him the likely face across the negotiating table if, and when, the UK begins post-Brexit talks over a new EU trade agreement. The UK Government had already announced that it would not be presenting a UK candidate for the new Commission. However, Ms Von Der Leyen underlined in a recent statement that, in case of further extension to the Article 50 period, the UK would be obliged to nominate a Commissioner. The European Health Community has welcomed the Cypriot nominee for Health Commissioner, Stella Kyriakides; a trained medical psychiatrist and former President of a prominent European Breast Cancer Organisation. If approved, Commissioner Kyriakides will take up a set of complex and, in some cases, politically-charged priorities, including “ensuring the supply of affordable medicines” and improving communications on vaccines in order to combat “the myths, misinformation and scepticism that surround the issue”.

According to the mission statement drafted by Von Der Leyen, Commissioner Kyriakides’ other priorities will include advocating for “a global agreement on the use of antimicrobials”; developing the potential of e-health through the creation of a “European Health Data Space”; and putting forward a new European “Beating Cancer Plan”. Once in place, the BMA will be scheduling meetings with the Health Commissioner’s new team to ensure that, in relation to Brexit and a range of other pressing challenges, the voice of UK doctors continues to be heard at the EU level.
Warning from EU Medical Organisations: Keep “Big Pharma” Out of Medical Training

A group of European organisations, including the BMA’s European partner CPME, has issued a joint statement highlighting the shortcomings in the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations’ (EFPIA) new Code of Practice. The self-regulatory code was recently updated to outline the scope of engagement of EFPIA’s member companies’ in medical educational activities. In what is criticised as an ambiguously worded text, the Code states that EFPIA members can be involved in medical education either by funding so-called “independent Medical Education” or by organising and providing input to the content of “Medical Education activities”.

The joint statement raises concerns about these new privileges, which they fear will allow the pharmaceutical industry to influence the content of medical education and to conceal promotional activities under the guise of education. The response signed by doctors, healthcare professionals, medical students, medical education stakeholders, mental health advocates and users of mental healthcare, says:

“Much of the medical education is currently funded by the pharmaceutical and medical device industries. This practice carries a significant risk to public and personal health, especially if it is not adequately safeguarded by a high standard of accreditation,”

The BMA will continue to work with its European partners to highlight the importance of transparency and openness in the relationship between commercial interests and medical education. It is vital that conflicts of interest are avoided as far as possible and, where they cannot be avoided, they are fully disclosed.