Mr Jerzy Buzek MEP  
Chair of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy  
Parlement européen  
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Brexit and Medical Research in Europe

Dear Mr Buzek

I am writing to you in your capacity as Chair of the EP’s (European Parliament) ITRE (Industry, Research and Energy) Committee regarding the implications for medical research across Europe, following the UK’s decision to leave the EU (European Union).

The UK is a world leader in medical research. A quarter of the world’s top 100 prescription medicines were discovered and developed in the UK, which also has the largest pipeline of biotechnology products under development in Europe. You will be very much aware that the EU has played a key role in the fostering and development of medical research in the UK, across Europe and, indeed, globally. We are extremely concerned that the UK’s decision to leave the EU could not only imperil high quality medical research in our own country but also in the EU as a whole.

We are conscious of the fact that the EU makes a significant contribution to UK research and, indeed, that the UK receives more in grants from Horizon 2020 and its predecessors than it has contributed to the programmes. However, the work funded by these grants is almost invariably undertaken in partnership with institutions in other EU countries and benefits from such collaboration. We are convinced that such continued partnership working is not just of benefit to the UK, but also to our partners in the rest of Europe and to the patients and public that we all seek to help and serve. We, therefore, ask that the maintenance of UK access to EU research funding and to partnership working across the Union be a priority in the forthcoming negotiations.
A vital aspect of the partnership working across the EU is the capacity for research staff to work, learn and teach in institutions across the Union. The staff concerned benefit from such exchanges personally, as does the research they undertake and medical research as a whole. This supports improvements in patient care across Europe. We, therefore, ask that priority is given in the negotiations to: first ensuring that existing EU and UK research staff have the right to remain at the institutions where they currently work for as long as they wish; second that UK research staff be able to work, train and teach in the countries of the EU and for the staff from the countries of the Union to have reciprocal rights; and third, that any administrative barriers to this are kept to a minimum.

As you will be aware, an important benefit of the countries of the EU coming together to support medical research is that rare medical conditions with small patient populations can be addressed more effectively. This has enabled medical research into these conditions to be undertaken and treatments developed and improved. We believe that it is vital for these groups of patients, both in the UK and in the EU as a whole, for medical researchers to be able to continue to work closely together on these conditions following the UK’s exit from the Union. We, therefore, ask that the negotiations make this a priority.

This brings me to concerns about the regulatory environment in which research is undertaken and promulgated. We do not believe that it is in anyone’s interest - least of all patients across Europe - for there to be barriers in the sharing of the outcomes of medical research (such as through the EU Clinical Trials Database) or in the issuing of new medicines onto the market. Hence, we believe that common regulatory frameworks should remain for research and medicines. In particular, we would support the UK’s continued membership of the European Medicines Agency and believe that this would be facilitated by the Agency remaining in London. An early resolution of this issue would, we believe, help stem the flow of expert staff from the Agency.

As the EP, and your committee, will play a key role in the "Brexit" negotiations, I hope that this letter helps you and your colleagues to ensure that, whatever the outcome, it secures and enhances medical research across Europe and ensures that our patients reap the benefits of this important work.

I would be delighted to further information on our concerns and look forward to following your Committee’s work on this matter.

Yours sincerely

Dr Mark Porter, BMA council chair