

Brexit: Healthcare Future?



Healthcare media has been responding to the United Kingdom's (UK) vote to leave the European Union (EU) last Thursday. In the historic poll, 51.9 percent of voters chose to leave the bloc while 48.1 percent chose to remain. Two-year exit talks with the EU will start once the British government activates the process. This is expected to happen within the next six months. Supporters of the 'Leave' camp originally claimed that leaving the bloc would free 350 million pounds the UK currently injects into the EU every week for the island's health and other public services. 'Brexiters' or 'Leave' supporters based part of their campaign on this figure. However, the amount has been disputed by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) explaining that money received back from the EU amounts to a net UK contribution of 150 million pounds weekly. The UK Statistics Authority has also criticised the sum as being "misleading". Following the vote to leave the EU, 'Leave' campaigners have confirmed that their initial figure was a miscalculation.

Nursing Times said: "The NHS must be protected in the wake of this (Brexit) decision... whoever is in charge must make sure that the services that protect the health and wellbeing of the nation are not threatened but preserved.... this is not a time for removing money from the NHS. Now is a time to get even smarter with the way we fund our healthcare provision."

Another key facet of the 'Leave' campaign was a claim that, outside the EU, the UK would have more control over who it could accept into the workforce. The UK has indicated it wants to strike a trade deal with the EU as part of exit talks but access to the single market of the bloc requires that there is free movement of labour amongst signatory countries. Several EU states have already said that the UK cannot expect special treatment in negotiating this point.

BBC health coverage revealed that the total number of all staff from the EU amounts to 4.6% of the total NHS England workforce. The healthcare system in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland do not publish a breakdown of staff nationality.

In terms of immigration cost to the NHS, recent analysis by independent charity the Nuffield Trust estimated that in 2014, EU migrants added 160 million pounds to NHS costs across the UK. It stated that this was a small sum when compared 1.4 billion pounds in additional costs caused by factors like treating an ageing population and non-EU migrants. The Trust also referred to the fact that EU migrants might be making a contribution as taxpayers to the healthcare kitty.

In a report in *Forbes*, the impact the Brexit has had on social care provision was projected as "making a bad situation worse" with the UK eventually losing staff from the EU it depends on to help support primary and long-term care. The report also predicted increased spending related to drugs testing and funding for medical research.

Meanwhile, *MedCity News* honed in on healthcare innovation with reference to a report on how a Brexit could make the UK less attractive to investors while Twitter commenters said a lack of EU red tape could make the island more appealing.

Source: *Nursing Times*, *BBC*, *MedCity News*, *Forbes*
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