



NEWS

Brexit fears: five minutes with . . . Matthew Shaw

The medical leader from Great Ormond Street Hospital shares his Brexit induced anxieties about the future of child treatment and research at the hospital

Rebecca Coombes

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“At the hospital we have real concerns over any future restriction of isotopes in the UK. Without them we wouldn’t be making many cancer diagnoses in children. We wouldn’t be diagnosing vascular abnormalities in children where this type of contrast is needed. We wouldn’t be able to look at tumours that might have regrown. Without a plan, we’d be a slave to a system where we wouldn’t know how long it would take for isotopes to go through the new borders.

“Drugs for children are very different to those for adults. Only in the past 10 years has the same regulatory system been applied to children’s drugs as it has to adults—and this is mainly because of European drugs regulation.

“The EU allows us potentially a much broader array of drugs—particularly important to Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) and for its patients with rare diseases—than we would have on our own and it allows access in a frictionless way. Currently, legislation isn’t in place in the UK to be able to approve drugs in the way that we need to do in the future.

“Any difference in UK regulations to the European system will mean added costs to manufacturers in getting drugs licensed and potential delay.

“The delay comes about potentially because some of these drugs are used in quite small volumes. The European market will be substantially larger than ours, thus stimulating approval on the continent prior to UK.

“GOSH is the UK’s biggest paediatric research hospital and one of the top three centres in the world. We treat rare disease in children, some of which happen in only one or two cases a year in the UK. This is simply not enough for us to do research in its own right. To show a benefit from the treatments we’re researching we must have partners and we currently collaborate with more than 400 centres in Europe. The European scheme for research, Horizon 2020, has 40 child health projects and the UK is involved in 32 of these. We punch far above our weight. The funding for these projects is €200m (£178m; \$229m). All of these programmes are at risk. Even before transition, world leading clinicians at GOSH are being excluded from Europe programmes after years of being at the forefront of them.

“There’s a question over whether we’ll actually have the workforce to do the research: 20% of our doctors are from Europe and 23% of our researchers at our academic partners, the Institute of Child Health, are from Europe. They are feeling alone and undervalued and uncertain about their future. This is not scaremongering. This is what’s happening now in the UK.”

Matthew Shaw is medical director, Great Ormond Street Hospital. He was talking at Negotiating Brexit, an event held by the BMA and BMJ on 16 November. Readers can watch Matthew Shaw at the conference here <https://bma.streameventlive.com/archive/113>

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