



Ein cyf/Our ref MA-P/VG/1254/19

Mick Antoniw AM
Chair
Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

28 March 2019

Dear Mick,

Following CLAC's recent inquiry into inter-governmental relations, I felt it appropriate to update the Committee with an update post the first Four Nations Ministerial meeting. The meeting, in London on Monday 11 March, was held to discuss the health challenges posed by Brexit.

The meeting was attended by the UK Government Minister of State for Health, Stephen Hammond MP, Scottish Government Minister for Public Health Joe Fitzpatrick MSP and Northern Ireland's Permanent Secretary Richard Pengelly. We jointly reviewed the steps being taken across the UK to ensure continuity of supply of medicines and medical equipment; workforce; resilience and emergency response, and the reciprocal healthcare agreements following the UK's exit from the EU. As you are aware, plans have been put in place across all four nations, as well as shared arrangements at UK level.

During the discussions I emphasised my deep concern over the proposed £30k cap for migration within the Immigration White Paper and the classification of care work as low skilled. This proposed cap represents a real challenge for the economy of Wales and for recruitment and retention within the health and social care sector specifically. Stephen Hammond recognised and shared these concerns. However, immigration policy sits with the Home Office, and regrettably he did not commit to raising the issue with his ministerial colleagues.

We also discussed reciprocal healthcare arrangements post Brexit and confirmed the close and effective working between governments on the legislative requirements and provisions in this area. I expressed my strong preference for EFTA wide arrangements rather than bilateral agreements with each member state. The EU will not respond until a deal is agreed by the UK Parliament and is advising its members not to negotiate bilaterally with the UK.

In a no deal scenario the existing reciprocal healthcare arrangements would be switched off. The UK Government has written to all EU Member States asking them to continue current arrangements until 31 December 2020. Arrangements would only be in place for countries

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Gohebiaeth.Vaughan.Gething@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Vaughan.Gething@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

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with agreed bilateral arrangements (which would replicate the current situation) with the UK. The Healthcare (International Arrangements) Bill will be used to give effect to future healthcare arrangements which differ from the current arrangements.

The meeting concluded with agreement to the following key points and actions:

- should we face a situation where supplies need to be prioritised, decisions will be taken on a clinical basis by all four CMOs collectively, rather than by Ministers individually
- all 4 UK CMOs will take decisions on allocation and prioritisation of all supplies in the event of scarcity, without any Ministerial involvement/ intervention;
- DHSC to share information on radioisotope, including through regular calls between officials;
- DHSC to share correspondence between UKG and EU on reciprocal healthcare;
- WG to share analysis of social care workforce in Wales when available;
- all four administrations will continue to meet and discuss these plans regularly from now on, no matter what happens over the next few months.

I am sure you will agree that many of the steps now being taken to prepare for a no deal Brexit could and should have been avoided if the UK Government had been able to provide certainty on our future with Europe in good time. It is more important than ever that the UK Parliament and the UK Government finally rule out a no deal Brexit. Failure to do so risks causing real and lasting health and wellbeing consequences for individuals, families and communities across the UK.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vaughan Gething". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Vaughan Gething AC/AM

Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services