

GILES CHICHESTER MEP

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PRESS RELEASE

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MEPs approve plans for cross border healthcare directive

South West Conservative MEP, Giles Chichester, said that Conservative MEPs have successfully driven the adoption by the European Parliament of a new EU Directive for cross border healthcare. Now patients in the South West will find it easier to seek medical care in Europe if their needs are not being met by the NHS.

Previously a patient's right to seek treatment in another EU country has been decided by the courts, but following the adoption of the Directive by the Parliament in Strasbourg, there will soon be a framework in place that provides greater clarity on when and how a patient can travel abroad to receive healthcare.

The plans were steered through the Parliament by Conservative health spokesman, John Bowis MEP, who has campaigned for patients to have a clear choice to seek treatment elsewhere in the EU.

Of particular importance for John Bowis is that the system is not exclusive and bases a patient's right to treatment on their needs rather than their means. Therefore a key feature of his proposals is that patients will not have to find the money to pay up front for their treatment and then claim it back at a later date.

The British government has opposed this measure. Labour MEPs refused to support the proposals despite them having clear benefits for British citizens. They want to tighten the process of so-called 'pre-authorisation' which would merely allow national governments to restrict the choice of patients in the types of services they can access across borders.

MEP Chichester said:

"This is a great opportunity for Westcountry patients with a recognised condition to seek treatment in another EU country if they so choose. Waiting for an operation is a very uncertain time for patients and the least we can do is put in place a system that will bring clarity to their situation.

"Patients should not have to go through a costly and lengthy court battle to find out if they can receive treatment and this framework will reassure them that they won't. Healthcare providers will now also have greater clarity on their responsibilities in this process.

"We are wholeheartedly committed to the NHS but patients' needs must be put first. That means all patients should have the choice to go abroad if they are not confident with the service they receive at home.

"Unfortunately Labour MEPs voted for what was convenient for the Government rather than what was in the best interests of patients."

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Conservatives in the European Parliament