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PRESS RELEASE

16 April 2009

EASIER ACCESS TO EU HEALTHCARE SERVICES

The European Parliament is expected to adopt recommendations by its Environment and Public Health Committee for an EU Directive which will clarify the rights of EU citizens seeking healthcare throughout the European Union. The recommendations emphasise that EU healthcare provision should be based on patients' needs rather than their means and on informed choice and not compulsion.

The entitlement of UK citizens seeking access to healthcare services within other Member Countries of the European Union is far from clear. Currently, the interpretation of a patient's rights to 'cross border' EU medical services requires the assistance of lawyers to clarify the judgements made by the European Court of Justice on policies defined in a range of relevant European Treaties. In essence, the Court has ruled that UK patients facing 'undue delay' in receiving treatment have the right to access another EU Member State's healthcare services and have the bill paid by the NHS, as long as the cost was comparable and the treatment was available in the home country.

This confusion over UK patient rights to cross border healthcare has often been the cause of disputes with our National Health Service, who have to authorise patient access to health services in other EU Member States. These disputes often cause distress to both patients and healthcare personnel.

The European Parliament is considering this EU Directive which will establish a framework for cross border healthcare whilst fully respecting the responsibility of healthcare services in each EU Member State. The proposed system will still involve prior authorisation by the National Health Service (NHS) to access healthcare in other EU countries but with a 'light touch', by providing the patient with information on the level of treatment they will receive. Patients will also be authorised to have treatment paid for, up to a maximum of what it would cost the NHS but will not be expected to pay up front for hospital services. These costs will be recovered by a system of reimbursement between the NHS and the EU healthcare service.

MEP Giles Chichester said

“Currently, if UK patients wish to cross the Channel to use healthcare services in other EU countries, they are more often than not required to seek the support of the Courts in persuading the NHS to give authorisation. This EU Directive will benefit patients by bringing greater clarity and legal certainty to their rights for seeking treatment in other EU countries. I hope that the European Parliament will vote for it in the April Plenary.”

ENDS

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Conservatives in the European Parliament