

Leaving Europe's nuclear regulator will put patients at risk, warns expert

July 27 2017

The UK's proposed withdrawal from the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) would threaten the supply of essential medical isotopes (essential for some types of cancer treatment and medical imaging) putting patients at risk, argues an expert in *The BMJ* today.

Professor Martin McKee at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, points out that Euratom "barely featured in the Brexit referendum campaign" and that government ministers have repeatedly dismissed concerns.

Euratom regulates the nuclear industry across Europe, safeguarding the transport of nuclear materials, disposing of waste, and carrying out research. It also supports the secure and safe supply and use of medical radioisotopes, that cannot be stockpiled because they decay quickly.

The Royal College of Radiologists and the British Nuclear Medicine Society have already expressed grave concerns about the supply of medical isotopes, following Brexit, and the clear risk to patients should supplies be interrupted.

While it may be possible for the UK to remain within existing arrangements, "it will be exceptionally complicated and the UK's position will inevitably be weakened," writes McKee.

Crucially, the government has offered no real clarity as to how any agreement might be achieved, he adds. The position paper on Euratom

published by the UK government in July 2017 contained little detail even on nuclear power and made no mention of [medical isotopes](#).

"Ministers have no excuse for failing to anticipate this controversy," he says. "The problems were highlighted clearly in an article in the Financial Times in February 2017 and in briefings by [nuclear industry](#) experts. Yet, as with all aspects of the Brexit negotiations, there is no evidence of any serious planning."

McKee calls for action on two fronts. First, the Department of Health must be brought into the Brexit negotiating team, as recommended by the Commons Health Committee. Second, the Department for Exiting the EU must urgently appoint a chief scientific advisor, as recommended by the Commons Science and Technology Committee.

More information: Why we must not leave the European Atomic Energy Community www.bmj.com/content/358/bmj.j3527

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