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Ms Rhoda Walker
Chair
Northern Ireland Rare Disease Partnership
(via email: Christine@nirdp.org.uk)

D Ms Walker

4 March 2019

Thank you for your letter of 24 December. I do apologise for the delay in responding. This was due to an administrative oversight over the Christmas period. I am sorry to hear of the deep concerns felt by your members about the potential impact of Brexit on the supply of medicines and other essential items for medical treatment.

Health is devolved in Northern Ireland but please be reassured that the Northern Ireland Office has been working extremely closely with the Department of Health (DoH) on the potential impacts of Brexit.

I can assure you that the Department of Health, in conjunction with other Health and Social Care (HSC) organisations, is actively engaged in extensive preparations for EU Exit, including the scenario that the UK leaves the EU in a "no deal" scenario.

In particular, the supply of medicines, medical devices and medical consumables has been identified as a key issue in relation to the UK exiting from the EU. In that context, the DoH has been working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) in England in developing UK-wide contingency arrangements. This will ensure that the health service, other service providers, and ultimately patients continue to get the supplies they need, in a timely way.

At a national level, the DHSC has had ongoing engagement with pharmaceutical companies and suppliers around the continuation of supplies of medicines, medical devices and clinical consumables. A comprehensive risk assessment has also been completed across all medicines used in the UK, including within Northern Ireland, to determine the volume of those medicines with an EU touch point and, therefore, at risk of a potential delay in reaching the UK.

Pharmaceutical companies have also been asked to ensure a minimum of six weeks additional supply for prescription only medicines and pharmacy medicines, over and above existing business-as-usual stocks. Contact has also been made with manufacturers of unlicensed medicines. Where necessary, additional warehouse space has been procured in the UK for companies to stockpile medicines, including refrigerated and room temperature storage.

Plans for a 'no deal' exit also take account of the possibility that delays on the short straits ferry routes into England could continue for more than six weeks. The UK Government has secured additional roll-on/roll-off ferry capacity on alternative routes away from Dover and Folkestone, where delays are most likely to occur. Medicines will be prioritised on these alternative routes and arrangements have been established for short-life medicines to be brought into the UK by air. Work is also ongoing to assure the flow of medicines from GB to Northern Ireland, without delays.

Patient welfare is the overriding priority and patients should be assured that the DoH and the wider HSC is working very hard to safeguard their interests and maintain supplies for all patients. In the event of a shortage of a medicine, plans are in place and the situation will be managed. If necessary, suitable alternatives or an alternative treatment will be provided until supply is restored to normal levels.

Advice for the public, including those relying on particular drugs or specialist treatments, is that there is no need for them to do anything different or new. Patients should continue to order repeat prescriptions, take their medicines as normal and not order more medication than normal. Information in relation to these measures in a "no deal" situation can be found at:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/medicines-information/getting-your-medicines-if-theres-no-deal-eu-exit/> and the Department of Health's (NI) website-
www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/eu-exit.

I hope that this letter gives you some assurance in regard to your concerns. I am copying this letter to the Permanent Secretary for the Department of Health.

Karen



**KAREN BRADLEY MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**