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The Rt Hon Matthew Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Department of Health and Social Care
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23 September 2019

SUPPLY OF MEDICINES IN NO DEAL UK EXIT FROM THE EU

I have taken note of a number of comments that you and other UK Government Ministers have made in the media about the supply of medicines in the event that the UK leaves the EU in the absence of a withdrawal agreement.

I have noted in particular your statement in a television interview on the 5th of August that supplies of medicines will “continue exactly as normal through a no-deal Brexit”.

You will be well aware that the preparations for a no deal exit now under way across the UK are the very opposite of normality. I have written to you and other Ministers in your Department on at least five separate occasions since last summer highlighting my concerns about medicine supply in a no deal Brexit, and only some of these letters have been replied to.

At this moment hundreds of Government officials, NHS and social care staff and at least as many people in pharmaceutical companies and in their supply chains are making preparations for the disruption that could be involved in a no deal UK exit from the EU. Officials in your Department are working flat out to maintain contact with scores of different pharmaceutical companies, and are keeping under review a range of contingency plans to deal with disruption in the supply of particular medicines. A wide range of preparations unprecedented in peacetime are being made for a country-wide civil emergency that involves a plausible risk to human life.

This is not normal, or sensible. Normal and sensible is a European-wide system of medicine licensing that allows patients and health systems across many countries to have confidence

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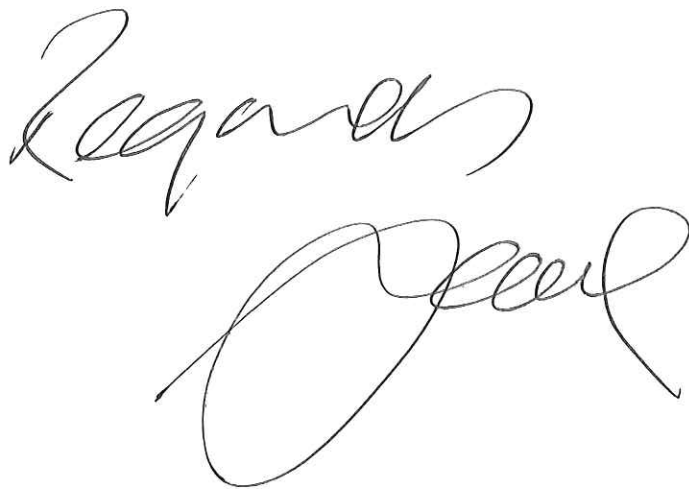


in the safety and efficacy of new medicines, enables patients in this country to be among the first to have access to innovative new medicines and allows companies in our country to find many more markets for the products that they have invested so much time and money in. Normal and sensible is also a European wide system of safety alerts that means patients in the UK are protected by reports of potential problems from the Iberian Peninsula to the Baltic States.

The Scottish Government will fulfil its obligations to people in Scotland, including to EU citizens living here. Across the Health and Social Care system we will make as many preparations as we can for a sudden no deal UK exit from the EU, and my officials will at all times work with yours, in the interest of our nations. We will continue to advise people not to stockpile medicines, as this could in itself cause supply problems and in any case may not be safe.

But the Scottish Government will not indulge any suggestion that the present circumstances allow the Health and Social Care system to continue as normal. UK Government Ministers continue to make choices that knowingly take risks with the health and care of people across the UK, including those who find themselves ill and vulnerable.

I am publishing this letter.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeane Freeman', written in a cursive style.

JEANE FREEMAN

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