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Letters to the Editor

Europe, immigration and funding the NHS

Sir, We write as former presidents and chairs of the UK's medical royal colleges and in the British Medical Association to set out why, if we care about the future of the NHS, we should remain in the EU.

Rather than ruining the NHS, as some have claimed, immigrants play a large part in running it. Without the 10 per cent of doctors and 5 per cent of nurses who come from other EU countries, not to mention even larger numbers of care workers, the NHS would face severe staff shortages.

Moreover, far from being strangled by bureaucratic regulations, we have benefited from Europe-wide action on matters such as new infectious diseases (including the Zika virus), environmental pollution, climate change, and antibiotic resistance — all of which are public health threats that do not stop at the Channel.

We benefit from rapid access to new medicines because of the European Medicines Agency, based in this country. In addition, about 20 per cent of our medical research is now funded by the EU; we receive considerably more back from the EU for this than we pay in. If we leave we can expect to lose a good proportion of this to other EU countries.

Finally, rather than the discredited £350 million a week that Leave campaigners say would be redirected to the NHS, it seems far more likely that there would be an immediate large decline in national income, which can only worsen the existing financial crisis that faces the NHS.

It is Brexit that is the threat to the NHS, not our membership of the EU. SIR SABARATNAM ARULKUMARAN, past president, Royal College of Obstetrics & Gynaecology, and past president, BMA; SIR NEIL DOUGLAS, past president, Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, and former chairman, Academy of Medical Royal Colleges; BARONESS HOLLINS, past president, Royal College of Psychiatrists, and past president, BMA; SIR MICHAEL MARMOT, past president, BMA

Plus a further 56 signatories at thetimes.co.uk/letters

Sir, Lord Lisvane (letters June 10) suggests that a narrow vote for Brexit would lead to a second referendum on the terms of exit. It is true that as a matter of strict law the referendum is not binding. The European Union

Referendum Act 2015 contains no provisions as to its effect in law. This is to be contrasted with at least some statutes (such as the 2011 referendum on the alternative vote) where the legal effect of the referendum was stipulated in advance.

But the government would ignore a Brexit referendum verdict at its constitutional peril. A majority vote to leave the EU (no matter how slim) would be a mandate from the voters to serve notice of withdrawal from the EU under Article 50 of the Treaty on the European Union. Holding a second referendum is not a constitutional option. The electorate has been asked only one question and would have given its verdict.

That result may be as discomfiting for those advocating Brexit as it is for the Remain camp. But abandoning our constitutional values may, in the long run, prove more fundamental than abandoning the EU.

RICHARD GORDON, QC
Brick Court Chambers, London WC2

Sir, As a lifelong Europhile, who stood in the 1979 European Parliament elections, I have incessantly asserted that the EU must relate to its peoples and democratise. I now reluctantly accept that that is a pipe dream, and that the European Union is destined (even without enlargement) to become ever-more complex, anonymous, bureaucratic and inorganic. Some of these characteristics are of course relevant to Westminster, but with concerted attention they could be tackled effectively. But then democracy, like charity, should begin at home.

Another contributor to the widespread disaffection is the growing gulf between the metropolitan elite and the "ordinary", decent Brit. That has largely overlooked the slow

collapse of community life everywhere, with its concomitant loss of identity, mutual esteem and sense of the common good. The EU influence is widely perceived to be anathema to that, and as being in hock to big business.

In short, the citizen feels outside the tent.

LORD PHILLIPS OF SUDBURY
Sudbury, Suffolk

Sir, Further to Philip Aldrick's report, "Emergency budget if voters back Brexit" (Business, June 11), I had half

expected George Osborne to announce his intention to hold an emergency budget in his budget speech in March. I am not surprised the rumours are now rife. Mr Osborne will want to show how serious an economic threat Brexit would be, and an emergency budget is one way of doing that. His focus is to stop international businesses leaving the UK, to encourage domestic businesses not to give up on international expansion and to protect new foreign investment.

If an emergency budget does take place, what can we expect? Probably bringing forward corporation tax cuts, possibly reducing the top rate of income tax to 40 per cent, cutting government spending further and making VAT changes that are currently not allowed under EU rules.

DAVID BROOKES
Tax partner, BDO LLP

Sir, The article by Steve Hilton ("Brexit will give power back to the people", Opinion, June 13) is based on the false premise that, through Brexit, the British government will somehow "take back control", but Mr Hilton does not even say how we could control the 188,000 immigrants from the rest of the world who arrived here in the last year, against 184,000 migrants from the EU.

Nor does he say how such a British government would replace the great swathes of "personal sovereignty" enjoyed by Britons and ensured by the EU today, such as the right to



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travel across the EU freely and cheaply, to study, work or set up a business, to enjoy home-cost mobile calls, cross-frontier consumer rights, family life and free healthcare, to name but a few.

EDWARD MCMILLAN-SCOTT
Patron, European Movement

Sir, Henry Winter (The Game, June 13) reports that some England supporters walked round Marseilles chanting, "F*** off, Europe! We are voting Out."

Presumably those who were later injured in fights and needed treatment did not repeat these sentiments to the French medical staff who helped them under EU-wide access to medical treatment (the European Health Insurance Card).

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