UK surgical trainees will continue to support European research collaboration

National Surgical Research Collaborative*

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Trainees are committed to continuously improving patient care. Over the past ten years, trainee-led surgical research collaboratives in the United Kingdom[1] have developed a track record in running high-quality randomised controlled trials.[2,3] As our experience has grown, so has our collaboration with European colleagues. We recognise that international collaboration is essential to running efficient, rapid trials that are generalisable across health systems and able to change practice.

We have actively worked with trainees from across Europe to develop international research networks. Building grassroots engagement and collaboration, trainee groups have helped run pan-European cohort studies through the European Society of Coloproctology and launched the student-driven EuroSurg collaborative network (http://eurosurg.org/). We have built on these foundations by running multinational randomised controlled trials, such as the Reinforcement of Closure of Stoma Site trial.[4]

The European Union (EU) has supported the development of research networks across the continent through the Erasmus and Marie Curie exchange programmes, Horizon 2020 funding, and harmonisation of regulation. We accept that there are diverse and complex arguments for modifying the UK's political and financial relationship with the EU. However, there is considerable uncertainty regarding the full impact of 'Brexit' on pan-European medical research. We are concerned that future UK access to EU initiatives and funding sources may be limited, and that the referendum result risks sending a negative message to our European collaborators.

Trainees belong to a younger generation that overwhelmingly voted to remain in the EU; a generation that has embraced the globalisation of medical research and the attendant opportunities for advancing medical science and patient care.[5] Science transcends national boundaries and the very best research has always relied upon

the free exchange of information and ideas. For this reason it is now more important than ever to ensure that incentives for international collaboration such as research funding, training fellowships and reciprocal exchanges between the UK and EU continue, positively advancing science for the benefit of patients across borders.

As a group of early career researchers and trainees, we are the future of surgical research in the UK. We remain as committed as ever to leading and enhancing high-impact research collaboration with our colleagues across Europe.

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