

Healthcare (International Arrangements) Bill

Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health and Social Care Committee, Chair, Liaison Committee (Commons)

I do not intend to detain the House for long. I support this Bill, but only regret that it is necessary. I wish to tell the House about an email that I received from a friend recently. He told me about his 92-year-old father who was visiting France and had a fall. He phoned my friend, who dialled 999 in this country, and an hour later his father was in hospital—“all of that at no cost to his father because he carried a European health insurance card. The close ties that we have involving our reciprocal healthcare are not just financial. They are also about those close links and data transfer. I profoundly regret that this is the kind of thing that people will not realise they have lost until it is gone. That is the great tragedy here. The point is that it is not people like us, who are relatively fit and healthy, who will necessarily lose out by having to spend an extra 10% to 20% on our health insurance costs; it is our constituents who are elderly, who have to have regular kidney dialysis or who have other complex medical conditions, who will simply find themselves uninsurable or having to face prohibitively expensive insurance costs, and who, if they run into difficulties while they are abroad, will find themselves really adrift.

I hope that the Minister will make it absolutely clear to our constituents that, 67 days from now—“the chances are looking more likely that we could crash out with no deal—“very, very many of our constituents will find themselves in a really dire situation should they fall into difficulties abroad. They need to be given clear and specific advice about their holiday plans. For those of our fellow citizens who have retired to the European Union and who find themselves in difficulties, I regret that this is a situation for which we will all have to take responsibility in years to come. I hope that the Government will rule out no deal because the consequences will be profound.

They Work For You