Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health Committee

The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful case. These points were raised with the Select Committee on Health in the run-up to the referendum. Will he join me in calling for people to submit further evidence to the Health Committee, now that we have launched our inquiry into what the Government's priorities should be during their negotiations on the terms of our withdrawal?

Daniel Zeichner Shadow Minister (Transport)

I thank the Chair of the Health Committee for her intervention. I certainly encourage those in my area and others to take up that offer. We will be doing so.

Let me come to the most tangible issue of all: the future physical location of the European Medicines Agency. Just last month, the Government said in a written answer to my hon. Friend Andrew Gwynne:

"The future arrangements which apply in relation to European Union institutions based in the United Kingdom should be determined once the United Kingdom has left the EU. It is too early to speculate on the future location of the European Medicines Agency."

Early or not, speculation is intense, and others are moving fast to gain advantage. The EMA stated in July that it

"welcomes the interest expressed by some Member States to host the Agency in future", while stressing that the decision will be taken

"by common agreement among the representatives of the Member States."

Various member states are already vying to host the EMA. The Danish Prime Minister has said he is looking at it. The Irish Health Minister has said that attracting the EMA to Dublin is one of the “more interesting” opportunities afforded by Brexit. Italy, Sweden and Spain are also reportedly expressing an interest.

The EMA employs some 900 people. What will happen to their jobs? Will those people move with the agency? Inevitably, there is concern that, should the EMA relocate outside the UK, there will be a knock-on effect on the wider pharmaceuticals and life sciences industries. When they next decide where to locate and invest, does losing the EMA hinder or help? In my view, the answer is fairly clear, but I would welcome the Minister's view.

We risk losing jobs. We risk losing influence. On a practical level, any company that sells to the European economic area has to have a qualified person for pharmacovigilance—a highly experienced, senior person based in the European economic area. If we are outside that area, QPPVs would have to move out of the UK or lose their jobs. There are 1,299 QPPVs currently in the UK. That is another potential loss, and of course, every highly-skilled job lost has a multiplier effect.
Perhaps the Minister can give us an estimate of how much all this will cost us. When I asked the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union that question in the House on Monday, he had no answer. I appreciate that the Minister, following the lead given by the Brexit Ministers, is unlikely to be able to provide detailed, concrete information at this stage. I have some sympathy; if you do not have a plan, it is probably best to say as little as possible. However, I hope that the Government understand just how important it is for the UK to retain the closest relationship possible with the European Medicines Agency. It is important for patients. It is important for businesses. It is important for innovation, and it is important for our economy as a whole.

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Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health Committee

Does the Minister agree that the reason why we have such world-class expertise is the workforce? We must be absolutely clear and send a message to the world that, within our science and research community, we will not be maintaining a list of who is here from the EU and who is a British scientist. We must unequivocally send a message that Britain is open to scientists, researchers and the medical and healthcare workforce from around the world and the EU, not just from Britain.

David Mowat The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health

That last intervention—"I say "last" somewhat hopefully—unites us all. It would be ridiculous if the world-class science that we must continue to do compromised on matters like that. I completely agree with my hon. Friend's point, and there is agreement across Government about that. If we need to make that clearer, we should.

I will finish now, as nobody is springing to their feet. I thank all hon. Members, particularly the hon. Member for Cambridge, for putting the issue on the agenda. It is right and important that the topic is at the forefront of our negotiations, and that we get the right answer in the end.