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SNP welcomes EU shift on healthcare

A press release by EFA MEP Ian Hudghton (SNP)

SNP President **Ian Hudghton MEP** has welcomed news that the EU is moving away from plans which would have treated the Scottish NHS as an economic competitor on a Europe-wide healthcare market.

The European Commission had previously proposed legislation on cross-border healthcare provision under internal market powers of the EU. Europe's health ministers have however decided that healthcare should remain the responsibility of individual member states - and that European legislation should reflect this.

The SNP has campaigned in the European Parliament against healthcare being treated as a purely market commodity.

Mr Hudghton commented:

"The NHS is founded on firm public service principles and the only shareholders are the people of Scotland. Attempts by previous Tory governments to open the health service up to market forces have been continually rejected by the voters and it is essential that the service remains in public hands.

"The NHS has however faced renewed threats from market forces through proposals drawn up by the European Commission. Thankfully Europe's health ministers appear to have rejected that approach and are supportive of each country's right to manage their own health services.

"The EU has an important role to play in developing healthcare cooperation across Europe. It's also right that EU citizens should be able to travel around Europe secure in the knowledge that they can access treatment if they need it.

"Nevertheless, it is for the people of Scotland to decide how our NHS operates and it is important that the EU respects that.

"The SNP rejects the idea of an NHS run for private profit - whether through Tory market principles or Labour use of PFI. The shift in position in the EU will allow us to continue to run our health service - there to serve the people, not the market."

Notes for editors

* The EU Council of Ministers this week reached a compromise agreement on a proposed directive on cross-border healthcare - see http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/10/st09/st09948.en10.pdf The proposed directive sets out patients' right to access healthcare in other EU countries.
* The Commission's original proposal was based on EU Treaty powers relating to the operation of the European internal market. The Council agreement changes this legal basis and moves the legislation into healthcare competences.
* The agreement also specifically states that the organisation and delivery of healthcare is a competence of each member state.
* The agreement will now be referred to the European Parliament for further consideration.

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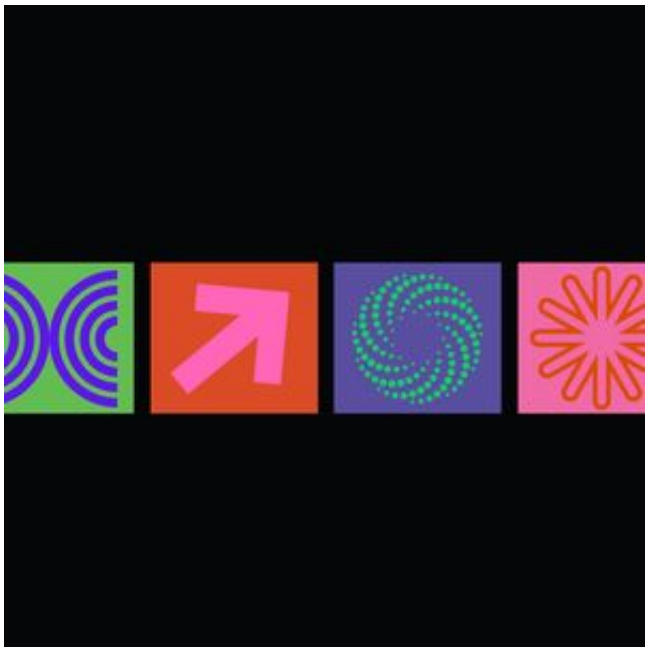

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