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Submission to the competition commission from the British Acupuncture Council

Summary

This paper provides relevant details from the British Acupuncture Council (BAcC) to demonstrate that BAcC members adequately meet the criteria of all private health insurers, NHS and GP providers to provide acupuncture services. The BAcC has highly respected codes of safe practice, proficiency and conduct, comprehensive complaints and fitness to practice procedures, continuing professional development processes, standards of best practice and treatment underpinned by evidence, based on scientific research and audit of patient outcomes. The BAcC is required by its professional codes to liaise with other healthcare professionals to ensure that there is an integrated approach to patient care. BAcC wishes to ensure that the competition commission states that BAcC members should be able to provide NHS services as well as be re-imbursed by all private health insurers (specifically AXA/PPP and BUPA who currently do not).

The acupuncture market

The attached article summarises the market for the 4 main providers. BAcC members provide around 2.25million treatments a year out of a total market of over 4million. There are also many unvoluntary regulated providers.

How easy is it to enter the relevant market?

Anyone can set up to be an acupuncturist. The British Acupuncture Council is a cohesive amalgamated body in existence now for 15 years, and with over 3,100 members, the BAcC has established itself as the primary self-regulatory body for the acupuncture profession in the UK. The BAcC also provides core funding for BAAB, which accredits courses. Acupuncture was recognised as 'robustly self-regulated' in the statement to parliament by Andrew Lansley, Secretary of State for Health, in February 2011. The BAcC aims to be an early adopter of the new Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence voluntary registration scheme. BAcC members are uniquely placed to provide acupuncture both privately, through GPs and within the NHS

Structure of competition

There are a number of providers who do not have a register of properly qualified members, comprehensive codes of professional conduct and safe practice, and a set of health and conduct procedures (which are regularly updated and developed to stay abreast of developments) as the BAcC does. The BAcC would like all providers to have processes that are transparent and committed to improving practice, through a continuing professional development scheme. BAcC also has a 'gold standard' medical malpractice and public/products liability insurance provided by one of the UK's leading insurance companies, Royal and Sun Alliance plc.

About the BAcC

The BAcC is committed to ensuring all patients receive the highest standards of professional care during their acupuncture treatment. Its Code of Professional Conduct governs ethical and professional behaviour, whilst the Code of Safe Practice sets benchmark standards for best safe practice in acupuncture. All members are bound by these codes which are reviewed on an annual basis. The Codes are rigorously enforced by the Investigating Committee, Health Committee and Professional Conduct Committee, all of which are made up of both lay and practitioner members. Details of the procedures adopted by the Committees are set out in the Code of Disciplinary Procedures and the Code of Health Committee Procedures. Members who break the BAcC codes can be fined, admonished or have conditions placed on their practice. In more serious cases members may be removed or suspended from the register. Although the BAcC is currently a self-regulating body, its

reputation as the lead body for acupuncture in the UK means that any sanctions imposed are treated very seriously. The ethical procedures are administered by the professional conduct officer, who is a qualified solicitor, and the ethics secretary. The BAcC regularly consults a number of experts both in relation to the administration and the formulation of the codes to ensure the highest standards are maintained.

The role and conduct of private medical insurers

The BAcC believes that it more than meets the criteria for its members to be re-imbursed by private medical insurers. Re-imburement currently does not occur with BUPA or AXA/PPP, who suggest only statutory regulated organisations can provide acupuncture. (although BUPA are currently reviewing their policy).

The role of the NHS

BAcC members provide services within the NHS and believes that the respect and support it receives from the Department of Health is indicative of its success in demonstrating that a voluntary self-regulatory body can more than match, and in some cases better the performance of a statutory body. It wishes to ensure that BAcC members can provide acupuncture in the NHS, alongside providers such as physiotherapists who provide acupuncture.

The role and conduct of GPs

BAcC members provide services in GP practices and via some GPs. It believes that its members should be recognised by all GPs.

Information

The BAcC also believes that its role extends to educating the general public about the nature and benefits of acupuncture. It provides support and information for patients and prospective patients, and maintains an informative website with plentiful resources aimed at all sectors of the market, from those seeking basic information or looking for a practitioner to those looking for the more detailed research which a series of downloadable briefing papers provide. It also invests heavily in public relations to ensure that the role of acupuncture in modern healthcare is fully understood.

I would be happy for this to be published.

Nick Pahl

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British Acupuncture Council

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