

Consultant 3

2 May 2012

Dear Sir/Madam

I am a Pain Medicine Consultant. I am fully qualified in my primary chosen area of medicine as an anaesthetist and subspecialty of Pain Medicine. I am a member of the Faculty of Pain Medicine of the Royal College of Anaesthetists. I am a Fellow in Pain Practice, this is, to my knowledge, the only internationally recognised, independently verified subspecialty exam in existence. This comes under the auspices of the World Institute of Pain.

I have been a consultant in the NHS and now work fulltime in the independent sector. Amongst the treatments that I and my Pain Medicine colleagues offer, is the facility of performing anti-inflammatory injections into the spine. I have treated clients of BUPA for over ten years in this way. BUPA have sanctioned such treatment and its costs for 30 years or more.

On 24th April 2012, BUPA sent a letter to many consultants. In this document they nominated those doctors that they deemed suitable to perform these spinal injections. They arbitrarily and without consultation with the patients or the doctors decided to exclude Pain Medicine doctors from initiating such treatment effective as of 30th April 2012.

Such amazingly short notice naturally has caused immense confusion. To date I am seeking clarification, but none is forth-coming. I may be allowed to perform spinal injections, but only if a 3rd party consultant, from a different specialty, LESS qualified than myself to make the decision, gives his or her approval. Clearly, this is decisive and cannot be in the best interest of the patients, as it causes delay, during which time the patient is in pain. There are some spinal injections that ONLY Pain Medicine consultants are trained to do - these treatments would therefore be unavailable completely.

The consequences of this action by BUPA, may mean that patients are diverted elsewhere, and appallingly may be offered more invasive treatment such as spinal surgery. In pain and desperation, with no other avenues to explore, they make an uninformed choice.

BUPA are clearly setting themselves up as the arbiters of what is 'appropriate medical practice' - this is a disgrace. The Royal Colleges and the GMC are the bodies who should make such decisions and not a finance company. It is interesting that the medical profession is open to scrutiny by patient groups, the government and the GMC. As a private company, BUPA are not open to similar monitoring.