

Consultant 40

16 May 2012

Having practiced medicine in the private sector for over three decades and having been a patient for far longer, I am writing in response to your request for information, published in the BMJ.

I would like to draw your attention to the ever increasing [X], unfair behaviour of the dominant private healthcare insurers: AXA/PPP and BUPA in particular.

There are three issues of note. Firstly, their dominance allows them to inflict cost cuts and thus reduce premiums in order to undercut their rivals to win over new subscribers. This results in an increase of market share and profitability.

Secondly, they invoke a [X] strategy towards healthcare providers (doctors, surgeons, physiotherapists, hospitals and clinics): they propose that the provider should reduce fees or alternatively face de-recognition. This is a huge threat from a PMI with up to 50% market share and frankly a strategy which must represent a restraint of trade.

Thirdly, they introduce restrictions to subscriber's policies without making this clear to the subscriber. There is an ever increasing lack of transparency in instituting strategies such as 'open referral' and 'managed care'. It is only when the subscriber wishes to claim, as a patient, that he or she discovers that they cannot see the specialist of their choice whereas the patient's NHS charter allows individuals to do so. Furthermore the patient may find that their disease or the treatment required is no longer covered. This 'managed care' cannot be in the patient's best interests either since the restrictions to healthcare are being invoked by non-practising doctors and managers working for PMI's, ultimately with an interest in profitability rather than clinical excellence.

The environment needs to move back to the position whether PMI's set their reimbursement rates and providers set their fees. If a shortfall results than the patient is simply made aware of this and has the choice to pay the difference or 'vote with their feet' and move to a cheaper specialist or institution. At the end of the day, private healthcare is about freedom of choice: freedom to be treated by healthcare providers of our choice and to receive the treatment that they advocate, not that imposed upon us by the management of private healthcare insurance providers.