

Consultant 107

30 August

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am Consultant Anaesthetist of [X] years and work in a partnership providing services to our local Spire hospital, an adjacent Nuffield unit and private patients on the NHS site.

BUPA fees have not increased at all during my time in practice and now they are trying to price fix by sending patients to those anaesthetists who have signed up to their new "assured" scheme. They apply pressure to the surgeon and patient to use only such anaesthetists taking no account at all of the anaesthetist experience, sub-speciality status, clinical expertise or previous record. This is clearly not in the interest of the patient, the surgeon or the anaesthetist involved, but has huge profit advantages for BUPA. I cannot see how this practice can be anything other than price fixing and anti-competitive.

Clinicians have a contract with the patient to provide them with the highest quality care possible. The insurance companies have to decide whether they will cover the fees of the doctors or not. If not *they* need to explain to the patient why and not vice versa.

I know of a patient who was asked by BUPA to choose between two surgeons (who had signed up to the BUPA deal) for their hip replacement - neither of whom specialised in hip surgery! This needs to be exposed and investigated in full by the Commission.