

Consultant 101

20 August 2012

A submission regarding concerns about the terms of the new Bupa Osteopathy Network.

Submitted by [REDACTED], Osteopath registered with the General Osteopathic council membership number [REDACTED]

I would whole heartedly like to add my support to the submission which you received from the British Osteopathic Association expressing their concerns regarding the new terms of the Bupa Osteopathy network.

The BOA submission is very detailed and covers all of my concerns. I would like to add how this will affect me on a personal level. Bupa has put a cap on our fees of £30 per treatment. Our current fees stand at [£35-£45]. Our practice ethos has always been to provide an excellent level of service along side excellent osteopathic care. We offer our patients a much longer than average appointment time to ensure that we are able to help patients understand their back issues alongside prescribing exercises and delivering treatment. We also provide full time reception cover to ensure that the Osteopaths are not disturbed whilst consulting with a patient. Our reception staff are paid fairly and our premises are kept to a high standard. Unfortunately none of this comes cheap and this is reflected in our fee. Patients choose our practice because of our reputation which we maintain by continuing to invest in our business.

The stance by Bupa that they will not allow patients to top up their treatment fee compromises the patients freedom of choice particularly in the respect of the potential quality of care which they may receive. Basic economics dictate that we cannot maintain our level of service on the fee offered by Bupa so Bupa is dictating the level of service which we are able to offer to our patients and is therefore withdrawing from the patient the right to pay for a certain level of service. If the patient is not happy to top up their fees and their choice of treatment is based on cost then they can choose to go to a practise which provides treatment for the £30 fee.

I draw your attention to a part of the submission given by the BOA, reproduced below.

Additional reputational damage from non-participation

Any decision by an osteopath not to participate in the Bupa scheme comes at a potentially damaging reputational cost because the consequence of a practitioner deciding not to opt into the scheme (for entirely reasonable and justifiable commercial reasons) is that Bupa designates the practitioner as a “non-approved” provider.

As Bupa well knows, labels such as “approved” or “non-approved” have many connotations in the context of medical care, the most obvious and important of which relates to clinical competence and/or reputation.

If patients are told that certain practitioners are “non-approved” providers in connection with the new Bupa scheme, they are likely to form the impression that the practitioner in some sense falls below approved clinical or ethical standards, rather than simply being unwilling to perform services for an arbitrary fee laid down by Bupa for reasons of Bupa’s own business.

Alternatively, but no less worryingly in a competitive market, customers may conclude (quite wrongly) that their preferred osteopathic practitioner is charging fees which are unreasonably

high and/or unjustified by reference to the costs of his/her practice or the service he/she provides.

Given the extraordinarily low rates now being imposed by the Bupa scheme, such an impression would be entirely misleading.

The views above of the BOA entirely reflect my own concerns. Ours is a small business which stands or falls by our reputation so how our patients perceive us is very important. The way in which Bupa could represent us is incredibly important and it is not just the client that they speak to but whom the client goes on to talk to and the Chinese whispers effect. I accept that Bupa is not wholly responsible for their clients perception but I doubt very much that Bupa is going to waste time explaining to their clients why some osteopaths are not on their approved lists particularly when Bupa is in effect trying to buy Osteopathy on the cheap. We all know and history shows us that when a sector is squeezed financially service, innovation and ultimately value for money drops.

I would be grateful if you would take my views and those of the BOA into consideration.