

Consultant 194

10 January 2013

Dear Sir/madam

I am a consultant urologist in the NHS with supplementary private practice.

A patient with a hydrocoele arranged an appointment with myself and surgery was arranged. It subsequently became apparent that the patient had not spoken to insurer until he tried to get the OK for operation. At this point BUPA refused to fund as I am not 'fee assured'. I pointed out that I charge at BUPA rate. Despite this some BUPA corporate policies preclude completely non assured specialists. They refused to pay the initial consultation. I chose not to charge the patient as it was a genuine mistake.

I offered to become assured but there is a waiting list. Despite several phone calls nothing has changed.

The patient was seen by a colleague and operated on. He suffered a delay of about 4 weeks. I suspect the patient and possibly the GP now think I am a second rate surgeon.

I have had other patients told that I do not charge BUPA rates. I have complained and BUPA agree that they can only say they cannot guarantee what I charge, however I believe the call centre staff routinely tell patients otherwise.

One reason why I avoided being fee assured originally was the poor remuneration for laparoscopic radical nephrectomy. I perform the bulk of these at my NHS hospital and I have numbers and results better than the average for the UK. A laparoscopic procedure is better for the patients recovery and cheaper for the insurer because length of stay is shorter etc. However, the code produces a fee of around £700 which is poor for a procedure that takes about 3.5 hours and requires an expert assistant. I believe the fee should be more like £1200. BUPA would not let me charge more if I was assured and yet I am the best person to do the procedure. By not being assured the BUPA patients are more likely to be offered a surgeon who performs very few procedures. This cannot be sensible and is counter to the IOG guidance on subspeciality practice.

I would be delighted to comment in more detail if required