

Consultant 20

3 February 2014

Dear Mr Witcomb

I hope that you will excuse me for contacting you. As an orthopaedic surgeon practicing at the Lister Hospital in London, I was disturbed by the recent proposal by the Competition Commission that HCA should sell two of its London Hospitals. As a surgeon who undertakes private practice at both St Anthony' hospital in Cheam and the Lister Hospital in London, I have been able to see, at first hand, the relative merits of a single independent private hospital and a private hospital that is part of a larger group.

While I have no doubt that you will be receiving a spectrum of views and observations, there are two observations that I would like to make. I hope that these will be of some help to you.

Firstly, my clinical subspecialty is the management of hip related problems. My work is divided between joint preserving procedures, for younger patients and joint replacement where such interventions are not possible. In my NHS practice ([redacted]) my colleagues and I have been able to introduce a number of innovations that have reduced patient morbidity and hospital length of stay. In my private practice, the HCA team has welcomed these innovations. Indeed, HCA has demonstrated a culture that is eager to embrace change that benefits patients and can be disseminated through their network. This is a contrast to a solitary independent hospital that is less confident to engage in change that may be seen as new or not yet mainstream.

Secondly, when I sit in my clinic [redacted] or login at any terminal at the Lister Hospital, I have immediate access to all imaging studies that have been undertaken throughout the HCA London network. In the private sector, patients may visit a number of consultants during their treatment journey. The fact that I can review all their relevant imaging studies is superb and minimises the risk of vital information being overlooked or investigations being repeated unnecessarily. In contrast, in both the NHS and at a single independent hospital, imaging studies from St Elsewhere's can be impossible to access due to IT restrictions and conflicts. The same argument applies to pathology results as well as access to theatre equipment that is needed from time to time.

I do hope that my comments will be of some help to you and that the weight of such arguments will allow the Competition Commission to review its recent proposals to better reflect the needs of patients and clinicians attending HCA's London hospitals.