

Consultant 45

6 February 2014

Dear Mr Witcomb,

Please accept this email in response to public invitation to comment on the review of above.

I write as an independent medical practitioner with no special arrangements other than practice privileges for in-patient and out-patient care at London Bridge Hospital and the Lister Hospital, part of the HCA Group of hospitals.

I feel that the level of care and quality that my patients (self pay or PMI) receive at LBH is second to none. The Lister has since being bought by HCA from the St Martin's Group (since gone) has improved considerably from its former base. I therefore have seen HCA's commitment to make major improvements at the Lister deliver major step improvements in quality of patient care. This has transformed the Lister's services, equipment and standards. Because of HCA commitment to best care, I have seen the Lister strive and make its own case to be as good as LBH. I feel having such competition inside HCA has raised the bar in both institutions (and amongst its other hospitals). Removing from the HCA Group, such a high achieving hospital as LBH will undermine and weaken the services HCA delivers to its other hospitals. This principle we now see is happening in reverse in the NHS - Kings Healthcare taking over failing South London NHS Trust because King's is a successful NHS trust. I do not believe fragmentation by sale will help the overall market because smaller does not equate with better in healthcare. Health care is not cheap worldwide. Its hospitals needs strong companies such as HCA, to be able to consider and support and deliver major change, such as HCA has delivered at LBH and the Lister over the years. Diminishing the HCA, I feel will undermine patient quality and care standards.

Over my 16 yrs years of practice at both hospitals, I have not had any formal complaints. I have and continue to be able to recommend these two hospital s as the very best private hospital available in London. My comparison is with and against private medical units at Guys, St Thomas' and Cromwell (the latter I practiced till BUPA took over and rationalised its lists).

LBH

The HCA Group have continued over many years to invest in both infrastructure, human resources and hospital processes to ensure the very best care. In my direct experience this has been achieved by strong leadership by HCA and commitment by them to care of the highest order.

I do not see this continuing if they are asked to dispose of LBH. The leadership in innovation around procedures, equipment and staff means HCA and LBH in particular offer me the very best option for my patients.

Transparency

While one recognises the market needs review periodically to ensure the client (of PMI) and patients (who self pay) get best quality for money, i have never and any complaints about this aspect of the market. Many patients are content to supplement their PMI for the quality they receive from LBH and Lister Hospital, in my direct experience. I worry that the review seems to promote the sectional interests of a select near monopoly of PMI companies especially BUPA and PPP. This seen in the way the big PMI companies have sought to manipulate the consultant market by quasi restrictions, inducement and confinements to

choice. This seems perverse, in that it is narrowing the market place in favour of a single homogeneous view promoted by the insurance companies.

Suggested solution

Greater transparency of fees is to be mandated. Great transparency of issues of insurance coverage and payee coverage seems the way to go I suggest. With this transparency, the market forces you seek to support, will be able to drive, more publicly, the issue of costs in the customers benefit and choice. Those who wish to remain 100% covered - can decide so - based on an explicit statement of what their insurance payments entitles them to. Those who wish to chose hospital X or consultant Y can do so based on explicit information about the costs and clinical quality of Hospital and of consultant. As you know increasingly clinical standard by individual consultants are available. The same matched for private hospitals and linked to fees is the way forward - not forcing sale of some hospitals - which seems a narrow solution to ensuing the market truly operates in the customer's advantage.