

Consultant 93

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Dear Mr Witcomb

I am a Consultant General Paediatrician and Paediatric [redacted] and have been in Private Practice for [redacted] years. I am writing to you regarding the Competition Commission's recent recommendation that two HCA hospitals be divested from the group. It is my conviction that divestiture in this instance would be a mistake and hence I have felt compelled to get in contact with you.

I currently work primarily at The Portland Hospital which, along with the Harley Street Clinic, Bupa Cromwell and Great Ormond Street Hospital PPU, is one of very few London institutes boasting top-quality private paediatric services.

At the Portland Hospital, quality of care is very high thanks in large part to the significant efforts HCA has invested in bringing together and integrating all the elements of a dedicated Paediatric Unit. The unit is top class as all staff members are truly paediatric specialists: doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, pharmacists and radiographers. The Portland is also home to a paediatric intensive care unit (PICU) and facilities are entirely child-friendly. This level of commitment is rare in the private sector, as proven by the small number of top-quality units.

I can say with conviction that my experience of HCA management at the Portland has been excellent, particularly in their enthusiasm for new medical advancements and the support they offer consultants in the development of innovative new treatments and progressive care methods. An example of which is the new paediatric interventional radiology service which provides significant benefits to patients with vascular malformations. I have also been impressed with the speed at which funding can be allocated to install new equipment, developments and improvements are taking place all the time.

The other top class hospitals within the HCA group also provide significant benefits. In paediatrics, we are able to share staff and facilities between The Portland and The Harley Street Clinic, boosting the quality of care for patients in both locations. To illustrate, a number of my patients are currently inpatients at Harley Street Clinic, where the inpatient ward best suits their particular needs. The fact that the two hospitals are part of the same network makes this arrangement possible. Information flows across the HCA network almost seamlessly. Consultants can access vital patient data and scans whenever they need to. Although this may sound simple, the benefits of this are significant and become even more apparent when consultants have to retrieve information from other hospitals. This process can be slow and laborious, making rapid reaction to patient needs far more difficult.

I believe that divestment of any hospital from the HCA network would be harmful. However divestment of The Princess Grace in particular would interfere with my practice.

Although it is not a specialist paediatric hospital, [redacted] The Princess Grace and my patients occasionally use the hospital. Due to its specialization The Portland attracts rare patients (as do I). In some cases, patients have conditions that are so rare in children that a sub-specialised adult consultant must be involved. In these cases, I will often take the child for treatment at the Princess Grace where I will cooperate with an adult consultant to deliver the best possible outcome.

I also often transfer teenagers who are still technically children to the Princess Grace. The Portland is no longer the best environment for them and so the better option is to be treated

nearby with input from Portland specialists. Similarly, children who have been treated by the Portland over the long-term will transfer to the Princess Grace when they reach adolescence, minimizing the complexity and stress of this transition has major advantages.

If The Princess Grace Hospital were to be divested, the systems I have outlined would be broken down as the network benefits between The Princess Grace and The Portland would no longer exist. From my perspective selling the Princess Grace does not appear to be a solution to a problem, but rather something that would create many more.

Finally, I would like to highlight that HCA is crucial to maintaining London's place on the international medical stage. Of the London paediatric hospitals only the Portland, the Harley Street Clinic and Great Ormond Street Hospital have a significant international reputation. Great Ormond Street Hospital can be capacity-constrained, leaving Portland and The Harley Street Clinic.

The Portland currently ranks very highly but medical institutions across the globe are catching up. Once they are able to offer the same quality, with the same capabilities at the same price, London will lose out. International referrers are already beginning to look elsewhere, for example in Germany, the USA, Thailand, and Korea. I truly believe that breaking up the only network that can meet the most complex patient needs will allow these competitors to catch-up more quickly and eventually replace London as the city of choice for international healthcare.