

Consultant 108

31 January 2014

Dear Mr Witcomb

I am writing to you regarding the Commission's enquiry into private healthcare. I am a physician and have worked within the HCA group hospitals for the past [X] years. Prior to this I worked in a number of private hospitals outside of the HCA group, again in Central London. I have a full-time NHS contract.

My letter has several objectives: -

1. To relay my experience of the effective quality systems that I found to be in place within the HCA group which I don't believe are present or of the same standard in the other private hospitals in Central London that I have worked at.
2. To express a view from someone looking after patients within the HCA group of the effect of the significant investment and innovation that HCA have made on patient management. This includes investment not just in physical infrastructure but also in processes to improve the patient experience and to rigorously enforce patient safety programs.
3. Finally I hope to explain why patients benefit from the HCA group of hospitals functioning as a network. I take responsibility for a number of committees that allow me to see that the culture of governance and patient safety extends to all hospitals in the group and not one or two hospitals in particular. It is difficult to believe that another operator working outside of this governance structure would be able to emulate the same degree of rigour in this process.

When I began working at the Princess Grace Hospital [X] years ago I was immediately struck by the emphasis that was placed upon safety and improving the patient experience. This was evidenced by the number of committees that I was asked to join. These committees had been in place for some time and took responsibility for analysing issues that may have an impact upon the wellbeing of patients. Importantly, and in my view in sharp distinction to many of the other private hospitals in central London, these meetings were clinically led and well attended by other clinicians. This is the kind of example of the commitment that I believe exists in the HCA group towards quality healthcare.

During the last [X] years I have seen significant investment and innovation at the Princess Grace Hospital. This is not just about improving the physical environment but also about creating spaces that enhances the patient experience. An example is the Oncology Unit. I would suggest that at many other centres patients would be sent for day procedures to a general ward where their special needs associated with having a malignant illness are unlikely to be met. The benefit of having a dedicated unit is that everybody working in it is likely to be attendant to the needs of the patient with cancer.

There is also significant collaboration between hospitals within the HCA group; patients will often have multisystem problems which extend beyond the capacity of any one individual or any one institution, eg women attending the Portland Hospital for an obstetric issues may require intensive support to manage a specialist medical problem. The expertise to manage these problems are difficult to find in the walls of one institution but across the HCA group this is rather straightforward and happens on the same day that a request is made for assistance. This leads to better quality care in my view. HCA provides services that extend beyond the boundaries of any one hospital, e.g. there is 24 hour, 365 days per year cover for

interpretation of laboratory abnormalities that are encountered in patients who are in the HCA group. Disrupting this network and the laboratory clinical interface is a potential risk to patient care in my view.

I have moved my private practice to HCA group and no longer work in private hospitals outside this arrangement because of the culture of safety and the support that is available to provide world class care. I hope this information is of assistance to you in your enquiry.