

Consultant 165

26 October 2012

Dear Sir / Madam,

As Chairperson of an group of anaesthetists I would like make some comments for your consideration for the investigation into the private healthcare market.

1. Group Practice. Whilst this may be viewed as anti-competitive, it actually conveys many benefits for patients in the independent healthcare sector. There is continuity of care, a good skill mix and out of hours availability shared within the group to deal with patient emergencies. Moreover patients have a single point of contact to arrange pre-operative consultations and advice over fees. For the surgeon/ hospital it is much easier to get anaesthetic cover for theatre sessions.
2. Restriction by Private Medical Insurers. Newer members who join our group have to be bound by the PMI fee schedule to be registered with them. This causes confusion for patients and indeed portrays the newer members as 'less skilled'.
3. Information given to patients by PMI. I find a little disconcerting for PMI to tell their 'clients' that they the anaesthetist is overcharging them whilst admitting that we are not employees of the PMI. Why do they not tell the patient what their maximum benefit is when they take out their insurance policy and make it clearer that patients are liable for any top up fee if the medical bills exceed their insurance limit? Feedback from our local PMI patients is one of frustration with the PMI over lack and conflicting information over their level of cover around the time of their surgery.
4. 'Bullying' of surgical colleagues by PMI's. They are starting to adopt the principle of not allowing a patients to be treated by a surgeon citing that it is because the 'anaesthetist is not bound by their fee schedule' and therefore the patient is liable for a top up fee. The PMI's role should be to facilitate the doctor-patient relationship and not dictate it which seems to be the current trend. It seems to be anti-competitive too as the patient may not get their choice of surgeon, anaesthetist or hospital.
5. There has been no increase in anaesthetic remuneration by PMI's for over 16 years and yet we are being accused of overcharging!