

Interim Guidelines Consultation

Co-operation and Competition Panel  
1 Horse Guards Road  
London SW1A 2HQ

26<sup>th</sup> April 2009

Dear Sir or Madam

As a member of the public and NHS user, I am concerned about the new body being set up to facilitate a market for health services in the UK.

I challenge the assumption behind this process, that competition between providers is a way of driving up the quality of healthcare. Private companies are motivated by profit, so their first priority is to reduce costs and make efficiencies. They can do this, for example, by hiring fewer and less experienced (and therefore less expensive) practitioners. Saving money in healthcare can be an inappropriate and dangerous business, as the recent case of the understaffed Stafford Hospital shows. Privately run Independent Sector Treatment Centres have not proved cost-effective for the Health Service because – for sound business reasons – they cherry-pick those patients with straightforward conditions that lend themselves to streamlined and thus cost-effective treatments. The private sector has shown itself to be interested in patients who are profitable, not in improving the quality of care.

By contrast, the NHS was founded on the idea of co-operation, with innovation and best practice being shared freely between medical practitioners. Co-operation between competing providers is far less likely, since this would not make good commercial sense. When a GP-led centre was put out to tender in Brighton and Hove, the lack of transparency about the process of awarding the contract to a discredited private company was put down to 'commercial confidentiality'. How can we be sure, if this system is pursued, that NHS organisations are not discriminated against?

The guidance documents produced for this consultation contain no evidence that quality of care will be improved by commissioning out services to the private or independent sectors, nor that there will be any cost benefit to us, the tax payers. I don't believe this consultation addresses the question of whether the British public wants to privatise health services or indeed demands more choice. The strength of the NHS is that as a public body, it has a broader social role, of offering the highest quality of care to everyone, regardless of their condition. I oppose the opening up the NHS to private companies who are motivated primarily by making profits for shareholders.

Yours faithfully