

PPUs predict long-term success

Compiled by Philip Housden

£1bn a year – PPU's confident of long-term growth

Private patient units (PPUs) are growing and should be confident of long-term success.

That was the message from many speakers to the sixth annual NHS Private Patient Units national conference at St Thomas' Hospital, London, before Covid-19 struck.

Trusts were encouraged by Nick Dawson, head of commercial, finance and analytics at NHS England and Improvement (NHSEI).

He said they should continue efforts to generate extra private patient income in line with best practice – and where this benefited local NHS patients and services.

Mr Dawson told delegates that NHSEI was working to support them from the centre and would share ideas and proposals for action in the coming months.

He said PPU's had an opportunity to fill in service gaps left by small private hospitals – and this could be worth an extra £800m to £1bn a year income to trusts across England.

NHSEI therefore wanted to identify best practice and then share tools PPU's could use. It also aimed to promote collaboration by developing regional networks so PPU's could support each other.

The event was chaired by the Guy's and St Thomas' Trust's head of private patients, Kim Foord-Paton, commercial medical director Prof Adam Fox and private practice clinical lead Dr Mark Ibrahim.

Their key messages focused on choice and patient safety. The conference was told that consultants might have a lot of choice on where to practise privately, but they would support their local NHS PPU if the service to them was professional and they were treated as customers.

Dr Ibrahim said: 'The Paterson inquiry and implications for high governance structures, which the NHS is the gold standard for most of the time, are going to show that



PPU AWARD WINNERS (L-R): Sarah Porter, Elyas Talha and Endri Setyawati. Details of their accolades are listed at the bottom of the page

you can be private, and you can be of the highest standard.'

■ See survey results on page 38

Support for a national voice

Trusts were urged to support:

- Collaborative working;
- The creation of more regional groups;
- A national support network to promote best practice and a more joined-up approach.

The plea came from Anne Bishop, private healthcare business manager at Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust.

She also chairs the only surviving regional support network for NHS PPU managers – the 29-member Western group.

Ms Bishop told the conference: 'I hope my colleagues working in private patient units will be inspired to take action and to be part of a really exciting change in the landscape where we can have a national voice once again.'

Options growing for PPU's

Sarah Porter, private and overseas patient manager at Taunton and Somerset NHS Foundation Trust, shared local examples of growing private treatment and care options.

These particularly involve self-pay and treatments complementary to core NHS services.

The Parkside Unit at her trust has 12 beds currently generating around £2.5m a year with growing revenue.

Insurers quizzed

Health insurers were present and an informative panel-based session included questions to John Crompton, Bupa's head of hospital management, Matthew Cox, hospital relationship manager at AXA-PPP and Dr Doug Wright, medical director at Aviva.

The challenge of balancing the price of insurance and costs of healthcare provision versus trusts' experience of lower tariffs for provision of more complex patient care were explored, among a range of topical issues and concerns.

PPU managers and staff heard that if PPU's were treated as a single provider, they would form the insurers' fourth largest customer.

'Make time for PHIN'

PPU's were urged to start using the Private Healthcare Information Network (PHIN) website to demonstrate their volume and quality of services.

PHIN's member services director Jonathan Finney said patients were increasingly searching trusted sources to help make informed decisions about their care.

Judging complaints for PPU's

Sally Taber, director of the Independent Sector Complaints Adjudication Service (ISCAS), reminded conference that private patients in the NHS cannot access the service of the NHS Ombudsman if they have a complaint.

Trusts can join ISCAS, a subscription-based member organisation, to provide an important independent third-stage review process for PPU's.

PPU growth predicted

As managing director of Housden Group, I delivered the annual state of the market report, confirming that recent years' growth trends are expected to be reported in trusts' 2019-20 annual reports and accounts, due in July.

Using data from a recent survey of trusts, the NHS PPU Barometer (see page 38 for details) total private patient revenues are forecast (pre-Covid-19) to rise around 9% to reach over £750m for the first time by 2021 – up over £100m in two years.

London delivers most growth and the top ten trusts, all in London, bring in 65% of the total.

The most important market driver is a top-led changing culture to support PPU's and patient safety in the light of Paterson, leading to more patient demand for the confidence of 24/7 critical care infrastructure and capacity.

I declared there was opportunity to open and grow PPU's in every trust, but joined-up thinking and action across the sector was needed to achieve this.

PPU Service Awards 2020

The conference hosted the inaugural Private Patient Service Development Professional Achievement Awards, which recognise excellence. The winners were:

- **Best customer and patient experience:** Endri Setyawati, chef at Bournemouth Private Clinic, Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals NHSFT;
- **Leading administration and back-of-house team:** Elyas Talha, international patients manager, Guy's and St Thomas' Private Healthcare;
- **Service leader for growth and development:** Sarah Porter, private and overseas manager, Parkside Suite, Taunton and Somerset NHSFT.