

Sector told to up its game

By a staff reporter

Private healthcare operators have been urged to seize the opportunity provided by the recession to up their game.

Bupa UK managing director Dr Natalie-Jane Macdonald told insurers and hospitals there was an opportunity for them to look at what customers really wanted and deliver it by modernising and making private healthcare more relevant for people.

She told Laing and Buisson's

annual private healthcare insurance conference: 'It is easier for us in the private sector to do this and to move quicker than the NHS. This is a real opportunity for us to add value.'

Dr Macdonald told the conference at London's Radisson Portman Hotel that it would be unwise to sit back and wait for business as NHS funding slowed and it began to struggle.

The alternative was to modernise. 'Healthcare, along with the law, is perhaps one of the greatest

service businesses which has yet to adapt to modern technology and put customers in the driving seat.'

She welcomed a call from General Healthcare Group's chief executive Adrian Fawcett for 'a joined-up and seamless customer experience', spanning all elements of the customer or patient journey.

Dr Macdonald said: 'This requires collaborative working between insurers and hospitals, a focus on technology to streamline processes such that they are lean

and easy for customers and an ability to aggregate and use customer data and information in ways to improve the management of health care risks of individuals and populations. Simply paying the claims or providing the hospital bed and theatre is not a sustainable long-term proposition.'

The democratisation of healthcare required parties to shed entrenched positions and take a longer term view, beyond the recession. The winners would be the ones who did, she added.

Surgeon markets her skills on TV

An oculoplastic surgeon is one of a growing number of private doctors who have been able to demonstrate their skills to a huge audience by performing a tricky operation on television.

Millions of eyes tuned in to see Ms Jane Olver undertake an operation on an episode of Channel 4's *Ten Years Younger* series.

She was operating on a patient's droopy eyelid to make it 'match' the other.

The surgery took place at The Cadogan Clinic day hospital in London's Sloane Street.

Ms Olver's work was featured after the clinic's public relations firm was approached by a production company which had worked

there before on another Channel 4 series *Embarrassing Bodies*.

Producers therefore knew the clinic was likely to be able to help the patient they were working with.

The film crew felt the clinic looked good on camera and they already knew its staff were relaxed but professional about having them present. Now future broadcast projects are planned.

Ms Olver, founding secretary of The British Oculoplastic Surgery Society, said she would normally look to operate on both eyelids to ensure an even result, but that on this occasion she was very pleased with the outcome. She had looked forward to viewing the results



TV star: Ms Jane Olver during the programme filmed in The Cadogan Clinic

showcased on *Ten Years Younger*.

She said: 'It's very difficult to operate on only one eyelid, as matching it to the other one can be very tricky. By planning the

surgery and using the latest techniques, however, we were able to produce a result that both we and the patient were very pleased with.'

Healthcode seeks talks with BMA on electronic billing

Healthcode, the electronic bills clearer to the UK private health market, is seeking a meeting with the BMA to clarify recent guidance on billing from the association's private practice committee.

The BMA had warned consultants they risked losing control of their private practice if they hand over billing to third parties.

Healthcode managing director Steve Carroll said: 'The recommendation from the BMA is that consultants should invoice their patients directly and ask patients to send the invoice on to the insurer for processing.'

'However, entrusting patients with the responsibility for sending invoices to insurers can result in

consultants losing control of their own cash flow.'

He wants to know if the committee, in drawing up the guidance, considered the role electronic billing can play in helping consultants issue and track invoices more efficiently.

Mr Carroll added: 'Chasing individual patients to confirm that

invoices have been sent to insurers for processing is perhaps not the best use of a consultant's time.

'As a result, many consultants fail to manage their cash flow effectively. Electronic billing provides consultants with a more efficient process for managing invoices and invariably results in faster payment.'