

FIPO Launches New Patient Charter

More than twenty professional medical organisations have signed a new patient charter drawn up by the Federation of Independent Practitioner Organisations (FIPO), which reinforces clinicians' commitment to acting in the best interests of patients.

Launched last month at a meeting attended by health minister, Lord Darzi of Denham, the FIPO patient charter reaffirms doctors' commitment to high-quality patient care and the principles governing good medical practice at a time when third party funders of healthcare are increasingly seeking to manage costs.

FIPO chairman, Geoffrey Glazer, said "There is increasing pressure on efficiency and cost control in medicine. While cost effectiveness is always vital, it must not take precedence over doctors' responsibility to recommend, and deliver, high standards of patient care. It is down to the medical profession, including the Healthcare Commission, Department of Health and specialist associations to ensure that top quality health care is provided at a reasonable cost.

"When financial service organisations, such as insurers, become involved in clinical decision making, it can result in some detriment to patient choice, safety and good clinical outcomes, as demonstrated in the US healthcare market".

Doctors and insurers have been at logger-heads in recent years as the latter has sent about trying to contain premium inflation with initiatives ranging from BUPA's specialty networks to new referral protocols and the introduction of controversial "Millimans guidelines". FIPO, along with other professional medical organisations, has vehemently opposed such initiatives claiming that they erode traditional doctor/patient relationships.

The new charter, which has been signed by most royal colleges and associations representing medical practitioners, includes a commitment to the maintenance of patient referral pathways; fully informed patient choice; treatment that is most appropriate to the patient and transparency in all matters between consultant and patient.

It also states "The doctor's duty of care requires careful consideration of the appropriateness and applicability of clinical guidelines drafted by professional bodies on a case by case basis. Standards of care should not be compromised by the application of care plans or guidelines which do not accommodate the best interests of the patient or in which outside financial interests prevail."

