

# Where is the sales pitch for NHS primary care careers?

I recently sat through a virtual careers presentation, hosted by a private healthcare provider. I honestly didn't know what to expect; it sounded interesting and I didn't read the small print before signing up. I was just curious to hear what they might have to say to early-career GPs wanting to explore their future options.

At it turned out, this was a polished recruitment drive for a large, established private general practice conglomerate to lure GPs to go to work for the private sector instead of remaining within NHS primary care.

The presentation emphasised how fast, efficient, supportive, and just how perfectly glorious everything would be for GPs as their employees, above every other employer in both private and public sectors. I do not feel that I exaggerate when I say that it felt like an *ad nauseum* sales pitch for over 2 hours.

Honestly, it felt like a bit of an over-sell. Surely no healthcare provider in this dystopian universe could be that perfect? All the presenters seemed to be singing from the same hymn sheet, with the identical buzzwords of resounding praise harmonising in similar orchestrated places.

### SALES PITCH

I am not against the private healthcare sector at all. Like many private providers, this particular organisation seems to provide services to large corporations who offer private primary care benefits to their employees in the big city. Fair game.

But every selling point for NHS GPs to join their company was a conspicuous attempt to one-up the capacity, agility, logistics of care delivery, and referral streamlining by comparison with the NHS. While they minimally acknowledged the obvious financial restraints of a national health service compared with their well-

financed corporate deals, they simply assumed the *de facto* position of being the obviously necessary alternative to working for the NHS.

Well that's the job of a sales pitch, I guess. It was indeed well presented and would pull at the heart strings of any GP who felt frustrated by the little and large stresses and limitations of NHS work in the current climate of political austerity.

### THE BEST KIND OF GENERAL PRACTICE

I however left that presentation feeling immensely proud of NHS primary care and the high but not perfect standard of care we are able to provide for all patients, regardless of their ability to pay, and without any insurance cover or payment required. Yes, this care is paid for by the taxpayer but, given that we don't have the resources to scan the heads of every headache-reporting client, we do a pretty damn good job at what we offer our patients based on good, evidence-based medicine.

I think it's fair to say that we all want to practise our profession well whatever the context. The ostensible offer from the private sector is that, if you practise with them, you will practise the best kind of general practice. You will have sufficient time to see your patients, you will have the most helpful colleagues, specialists won't be resistant to your referrals, and appropriate diagnostic tests and treatments will be available to you without undue delay. The natural questions that follow are: what are the particular barriers to making these standards consistently available in NHS primary care and what innovative transformation is required to make this a reality?

I was left with a mild sense of injustice. Such corporate providers are very clearly going to continue exploiting every perceived weakness or professional challenge within

NHS care to win over the hearts and minds of GPs. So what are we going to do to stem the impending professional haemorrhage in the face of such marketing tactics?

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