

# More for less

Government's plan to increase private sector competition within the NHS is a controversial issue, but when it comes to rehabilitation it can bring key benefits, suggests **Heather Batey**



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**T**here can be no doubting the Government's future vision for the NHS. Under a mantra of more for less during what are straitened times, it has demanded an improved service but at a lower cost.

Competition between private sector providers, as compared with a simple public-sector monopoly, is surely the best way of achieving more for less. The result is a lower cost, more efficient service.

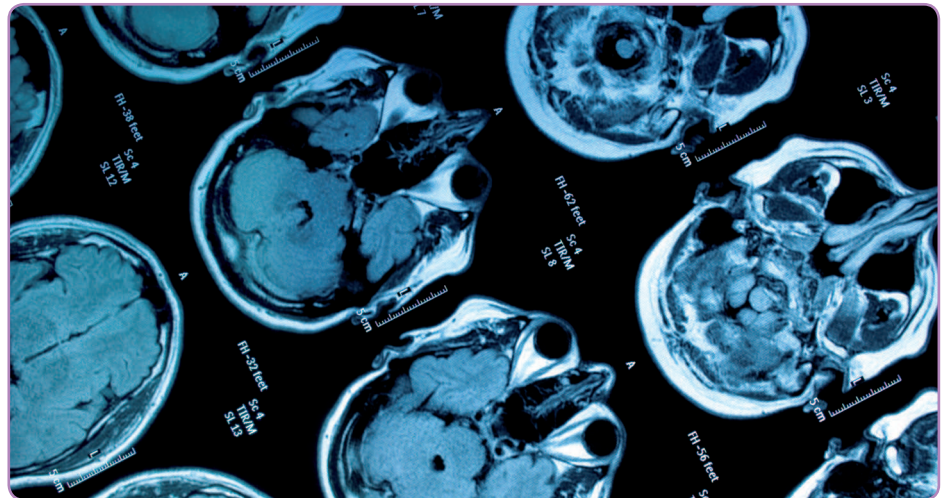
We are, of course, speaking of service provision and the Government, via local purchasers, will still pay for this statutory service which will continue to be free to the user at the point of receipt.

But what are the likely effects of this radical approach on rehabilitation after discharge from in-patient care, especially relating to traumatic brain injury (TBI) and stroke patients?

### Differing approaches

In-patient care moves from the initial intensive phase immediately after the traumatic event via the acute to the post-acute stage. This is followed by discharge into the community – either at home, with visits by a public-sector therapist, or to a specialist private sector rehabilitation provider in a residential unit. An alternative approach sees this also being carried out in the injured person's own home and is commonly known as home-based rehabilitation (HBR).

Reach is a nationwide private sector organisation set up in 1994 to provide an effective alternative to residential rehabilitation for child and adult survivors of severe traumatic brain injury, in the form of unique home and community



based rehabilitation. Having over 20 years' experience in rehabilitation of this type, the benefits it brings to both the TBI sufferer and also the healthcare provider is clear.

In-patient care costs several thousand pounds each day, hence the requirement for cost-effective post-hospital rehabilitation service. The NHS, as purchaser, would potentially save a great deal of money if discharge could be brought forward even by as little as a few days.

There are even more significant, though more long-term potential savings NHS purchasers can find from effective post in-patient rehabilitation. It stands to reason that people who receive both early and effective rehabilitation – after all they deserve every possible chance to lead a normal life and re-acquire the kind of skills most of us take for granted every day – are likely to be less of a burden on the social services sector and the Treasury.

The individual themselves (not to mention their carers) also benefit psychologically and economically from being back to work.

### Choosing provider

Against a backdrop of public sector provision historically facing capacity issues, how should an NHS purchaser choose between private sector providers?

Both residential and home-based rehabilitation for brain injured and stroke patients deal with their cognitive, functional, social and psychological consequences.

But whereas the former takes place away from the home, family and local environment to which the client will eventually return, the opposite is true of HBR. In this instance it is possible to tackle the full range of post-traumatic problems in the real world where they occur and not in an artificial setting, often many miles away.

There is, therefore, a strong case for HBR for a variety of clinical interventions alongside on the grounds of both relevance and of family involvement. There can also be no doubt that it wins out on the issue of cost time and time again.

So in conclusion, the Government's general approach to the NHS seems likely to favour the provision of some form of active post-discharge rehabilitation when it comes to traumatic brain injured patients, for this to be provided by the private sector, and for HBR to be preferred over the residential variety.

Providing more for less alongside excellent outcome results for these patients really seems like a win, win situation for everybody concerned. ✚