

Hospital ads 'to lure patients'

As the government gives people greater choice over where they are treated, one independent hospital chain which treats NHS patients, has taken the lead.

Capio is currently running adverts targeted at GPs and health workers.

The NHS Confederation, which represents health service managers, said it was highly likely that NHS providers would consider similar types of advertising.

The Department of Health is drawing up a code for NHS providers advertising for patients, which would be self-regulating.

'Natural response'

A department spokesman said it was too early to say what form any advertising campaigns would take.

It is thought it would be up to individual hospitals to decide how much they spend and advertisements would be one way to present the successes of particular hospitals to patients.

The Capio advertisement has appeared in several GP and health publications, and featured a consultant and nurse alongside a cook and a porter by the caption 'We believe in working together'.

A spokeswoman for the NHS Confederation said targeted advertising was a "natural response to the choice agenda". She added: "We believe that it is very important that there is a code for marketing and advertising NHS services that is genuinely self-regulating so that all providers can sign up - including NHS trusts, foundation trusts and independent providers.

"The choice agenda is a big change for the NHS and the public need to have confidence in the system of marketing and advertising."

Patients are now able to choose, from a limited selection, which hospital they wish to be treated at.

In addition, a new system called payment by results means hospitals will be paid per patient treated.

Capio has a contract to treat about 95,000 NHS patients over five years in nine centres in England.

Its next campaign is expected to target patients.

Capio chief executive, Tom Mann, said: "As a comparatively new provider, we need to use marketing to inform the people who influence patient choice.

"This is a natural part of developing a competitive marketplace."

A Department of Health spokesman said: "The draft code of conduct is being finalised at the moment after discussion with stakeholders, providers and the NHS."

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