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Doctors' Groups Sign Charter for Quality of Care

More than 20 medical royal colleges and specialist associations have signed up to a new charter reaffirming doctors' commitment to high quality patient care.

The charter was unveiled this week by the Federation of Independent Practitioner Organisations (FIPO) and aims to address the problems created by increasing involvement of financial organisations in clinical decision-making.

FIPO president, Mr. Geoffrey Glazer said medicine was suffering because of an increasing focus on efficiency and cost control. He added "While cost-effectiveness is always vital, it must not take precedent over doctors' responsibility to recommend and delivery high standards of patient care."

Mr. Glazer warned of problems in the private healthcare market, where insurers were attempting to direct patient care through specialty networks and were adversely affecting patient choice, safety and clinical outcomes.

FIPO warned that such an approach – reminiscent of the US system of managed care – was likely to be applied more widely as commercial organisations became more involved in commissioning for the NHS.

The nine-point charter – which has also been endorsed by the GMC – defends every patient's right to receive treatment suited to their individual condition and emphasises the importance of a strong relationship between doctors and patients.

It also insists that doctors provide patients with "objective, unbiased professional advice" to enable them to make informed choices. In turn, both specialists and GPs must provide good continuity of care through effective communication.

Signatories to the charter also recognise that consultants working in the independent sector should undergo regular peer appraisal and audit.

Mr. Glazer added "This charter is about care in the hands of doctors, choice in the hands of patients."