

INDEPENDENT PRACTITIONER

THE BUSINESS MAGAZINE FOR DOCTORS WITH A PRIVATE PRACTICE

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Marketing à la mode

Private practice marketing took to the high street when a clinic teamed up with a top women's designer store for a winter collection fashion show.

Kissable lips and kooky shoes proved a killer combo at the glittering evening which brought together 65 key customers of Absolute Aesthetics, a division of The Whiteley Clinic, and LK Bennett in Guildford's High Street, Surrey.

Partygoers were also given the latest low-down on new non-surgical beauty treatments and staff from both businesses spent the evening networking with them.

Offers included a 15% discount off selected treatments and 20% off fashion wear bought on the night.

Clinic director Vicki Smith (left, with staff) said the evening was a huge hit and new patients booked for treatments as a result.

A prosperous New Year

By Robin Stride

Independent practitioners have been told they will face exciting new business opportunities in 2011 despite reports of a decline in private medical insurance (PMI) and self-pay patients.

According to one expert, it is a 'fantastic time' to enter the sector and specialists can be 'very optimistic' about private prospects.

Barrister Stephen Collier, general counsel at BMI Healthcare, told doctors at the Healthcare Events practice development conference in London: 'We and consultants have seen some decline in private activity, but we confidently expect to see that turn around in the next 12 months.'

He said private practice's biggest

driver would be the economy, particularly £20bn of budget cuts planned for the NHS.

His upbeat outlook is backed by market commentators Laing and Buisson, who doubt there will be a move to large-scale private service development in NHS hospitals if an expected law change allows the private patient cap to be lifted.

Instead, they expect a greater likelihood for more independent hospital groups to partner with foundation trusts to deliver private patient services. Although small-scale, with modest capital investment, these could open up for consultants in an increasing number of geographical areas.

Laing's *Healthcare Market Review 2009-10* edition foresees foundation trusts merging more easily

and the development of networks of private patient units managed in-house or by independent-sector operators. They are expected to form stronger relationships with medical insurers, and enjoy some economies of scope and scale.

The report says demand for private acute healthcare is likely to pick up modestly in the medium term as economic growth sluggishly recovers. The outlook looks good for increasing day surgery capacity.

Private healthcare is vulnerable to NHS improvements, but report author, economist Philip Blackburn, says it is also likely to benefit if satisfaction with NHS services declines. He has doubts whether the Coalition Government can greatly improve NHS performance without ruining their fiscal plan.

Following major hospital groups reporting signs of a recovery in the self-pay market, the report projects a 5-10% growth in revenue terms as the economy slowly improves. It says any significant rise in NHS waiting lists, locally or nationally, 'is certain to energise demand' for self-pay private healthcare.

Self-pay's long-term prospects are seen as 'favourable' as advances in specialist healthcare technologies widen choice and drive 'high-tech' specialist developments.

Laing and Buisson estimated PMI and self-insured medical expenses, which suffered a 5% drop in volume of demand in 2009, were unlikely to see a cyclical pick-up until 2012 at the earliest. It said 7,238,000 patients had insurance cover this time last year.

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