

Debate

Is private healthcare essential today?

Should you pay out for medical care? Two experts argue their cases...

Yes



'It's the extra time we have that makes us so unique,'

says Dr Natalie-Jane Macdonald, MD of Bupa UK Health Insurance

No one can deny that for emergencies, the NHS is outstanding. But the majority of treatment most of us need during our lives isn't an emergency – and this is where private healthcare comes in. Bupa patients have more choice about their treatment and usually have some input into when and where it takes place. They may also have access to treatment that's restricted on the NHS, where there can be shortages of resources for some things, such as certain cancer drugs or infertility programmes.

'NHS patients may also face a postcode lottery, with their quality of care or treatment dependent on where they live. This is something our members never have to worry about – they know they will get the best solutions available.

'We're also able to offer a lot more in the way of alternative therapies, like chiropractics, osteopathy,

acupuncture and homeopathy. Bupa doctors also have more time to talk to patients about their preferences, and even use alternative treatments to complement traditional medicine.

'Those who have a Bupa membership also say they take comfort from the fact they're likely to be cared for by the same doctor throughout their treatment. This is particularly beneficial when you're ill and are perhaps feeling more vulnerable than usual, and less able to make important decisions rationally and calmly. We can also spend more time making sure that all the members of the family understand the situation and are coping well under the circumstances.

'At the end of the day, I believe health should be a priority, even in an economic downturn.'

• For more on Bupa, log onto www.bupa.co.uk.

No



'The NHS has the best experts and hospitals,'

says Dr Alan Maryon-Davis, President of the Faculty of Public Health

Our health service is already one of the best in the world, and it's getting better. There have been problems, such as the so-called postcode lottery, but now there are strict regulations across the board to ensure every primary care trust meets the high standards we set. And NHS hospitals are now cleaner than ever, with the latest figures showing cases of C diff and MRSA are falling.

'What's more, all of the UK's leading experts and facilities are on the NHS. We use the latest technology and equipment with expert diagnosis. And whereas we always have a full rota of staff, the private sector may not have adequate staff cover or, say, blood supplies for unplanned operations. It's also worth bearing in

mind that if anything does go wrong, you're taken to an NHS emergency ward anyway – whether or not you have paid to go private.

'The NHS is also fantastic for the 60% of the population who suffer from chronic diseases, such as diabetes, asthma, arthritis or mental health issues, as these people are unlikely to get private health cover without sky-high premiums. Eighty per cent of primary care trusts now offer free cycles of IVF, and the newest cancer drugs are always available somewhere on the NHS.

If a drug isn't available in your area, your GP can now refer you elsewhere for a consultation. We are fortunate to have an NHS, and it should be cherished!

• For more on the NHS, visit www.nhschoice.co.uk. □



Does it pay to go private?



Top Santé Talkback

Have you paid for private healthcare, or do you think it's unnecessary? We'd love to hear your views, so email us at: talkback@topsante.co.uk.