

## 'Cookbook care' arrives in the UK

By Melanie Newman

A consultancy whose care plans have been used in the US to overrule doctors' decisions unveiled UK versions of its guidelines this week.

The introduction of the guidelines in the UK has angered the BMA.

Milliman guidelines cover all aspects of care, from whether a procedure is necessary to how long a patient should spend in a chair on the third day postoperatively.

The company has adapted its guidelines for BUPA Health Insurance and this week launched manuals covering ambulatory, inpatient and surgical care in the UK.

In the US, the guidelines and their implementation by insurers have been heavily criticised. Doctors argue that Milliman's recommendations on lengths of stay (LOS), in particular, are unrealistic. The US guideline on hip replacement suggests a three-day LOS, though it offers a list of circumstances in which this may be extended. The average in the NHS is 9.4 days.

BMA private practice committee chairman Mr Derek Machin said: 'This will meet huge resistance in the UK. Milliman guidelines take no account of individual circumstances - they are the opposite of patient-centred care.'

Pulitzer-prize winning journalists Donald Barlett and James Steele say the guidelines are used inflexibly in the US to save money and maximise profits.

In their book, *Critical Condition*, they said: 'Rather than serving as a guide, the manuals have become the bibles for insurers to exert strong pressure on doctors and hospitals.'

Milliman says all its recommendations are based on the best clinical evidence, both published and unpublished, and annually updated.

Marketing director Scott Harris told *Hospital Doctor*: 'They are never meant to supplant a clinician's judgement on individual patients.'

Dr James Schibanoff, editor in chief of the guidelines, added: 'The majority of our customers are hospitals, not insurers, who use the guidelines to improve quality.'

BUPA Health Insurance's medical director, Dr Natalie-Jane Macdonald, said the guidelines would not be incorporated into consultants' recognition contracts. She added: 'We have a challenge to deal with the cost of private care. We can't let inefficient practice carry on forever.'

Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust last week began piloting the guidelines on patients with fractured neck of femur. An influential group of NHS commissioners has also shown interest in Milliman guidelines.

Milliman's past recommendations

1. Mastectomies may be performed on an outpatient basis
2. Congestive heart failure patients to be hospitalised up to a day
3. Twenty-four hours in hospital is standard for a vaginal birth
4. Elderly patients with cataracts should receive surgery in only one eye, as seeing with both eyes is not essential

Source: *Critical Condition* (2004) by Donald L Barlett and James B Steele