

Is the ‘Uber of Psychiatry’ Actually Helping People?

ADHD diagnoses are big business.

by John Lubbock
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Psychiatry UK charges £360 for a one-hour online ADHD assessment with a consultant. Credit: Adobe Stock

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The founder of Psychiatry UK, the largest UK provider of online mental health services, has described its business model as “Uber psychiatry”. The private company focuses on attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) diagnoses and provides services to the NHS. Psychiatry UK has seen its [income double year-on-year](#), more than doubling from £17.6m to £38.1m in the last financial year.

Psychiatry UK was [bought by a private equity firm in 2024](#). I first spoke to its founder, John Chanter, in 2023 after having an assessment with the company. Regarding the firm’s business model, Chanter told me: “What I set up was Uber psychiatry. [Clinicians are] paid by the hour, or rather, by the patient hour. And as such, they’ve got a huge incentive to see more patients.”

[Like Uber](#), none of the contractors are employed, but are all “running their own little businesses”. Chanter continued: “So most of them were working, part-time for us, part-time in the NHS. I actually think that there are considerable benefits to the doctors by being self-employed ‘consultants’ rather than employees. They may not have security and sick pay, but they are free to sell their services to whom they please – and they are a scarce resource.”

Chanter described his philosophy as a form of benevolent capitalism. He said: “I am an entrepreneur – but a social entrepreneur. My personal fight has always been with the bureaucrat – the state. I therefore want to see the NHS freed from the shackles of state control, but not handed over to the capitalists. I think it should be run by clinicians.”

There were around 196,000 adults waiting for ADHD services in the UK in 2024, [according to a BBC investigation](#). As waiting lists have soared, the NHS has brought in private firms to reduce the backlog. These companies claim to provide specialised consultations more cheaply than is possible within the NHS.

Patients in England can currently select a private provider to have their ADHD or autism assessment through [under the ‘right to choose’](#). There are [17 companies](#) now offering ADHD assessments, with waiting times ranging between six and 72 weeks. Psychiatry UK’s waiting time is listed as up to 52 weeks, and it [charges £360](#) for a one-hour online ADHD assessment with a consultant. This includes a “full initial assessment, opinion, recommendations, suggested treatment plan and report”.

One Psychiatry UK patient told Novara Media: “Honestly my experience with them hasn’t been great – but it’s complicated. My GP was honest that if I’d waited for assessment and treatment locally, it would have been five years plus. I started [titration for ADHD meds](#) and found out I was expecting, and Psychiatry UK literally just discharged me.

“The perinatal psychiatrist at the hospital was pretty disgusted. They had told me I could just come back as soon as I wasn’t breastfeeding. I came back to them nine months ago and was told I had to just go back on the waiting list and needed a new referral from my GP – I assume so [Psychiatry UK] could charge them for the service again.”

Patients have also shared negative experiences with the private company online. One commenter on a [r/ADHDDUK subreddit thread](#) specifically devoted to Psychiatry UK wrote: “They’ve disbanded me like a piece of shit from their shoe. Worse still, they didn’t even explain what needs to happen after being forcibly discharged due to a stock shortage.”

Psychiatry UK declined to comment. A PR consultant working for the company, Tim Lines, said: “We have spoken with Jon Chanter (who left Psychiatry UK in 2023) and can confirm that the term ‘Uber psychiatry’ was used to highlight the positive change Psychiatry UK was making in the provision of mental health services.”

Former Psychiatry UK clinician Dr Alan Cross told Novara Media that there are differences between a traditional NHS ADHD assessment and one provided by an online private company: “When I assessed patients in a hospital ADHD clinic setting, they already had [an] ECG, blood screening, and full and completed pre-assessment forms before the secretaries booked them an appointment. A lot of people fidget off camera, and you often don’t see that on a screen, so it’s important to ask about it in the assessment.”

Cross claims that the NHS’s failure to build capacity has effectively outsourced a large portion of ADHD care to the private sector by default. In his recent report on adult ADHD care in the UK, [Cross states](#): “Without urgent reform, the UK risks regressing into a two-tier system, where only those with private means can access timely ADHD care”.

Cross’s report details a “quality variability” across private ADHD services, finding that a lack of systematic oversight means potential for “inconsistent diagnostic thresholds or suboptimal assessment processes”.

In 2023, [shortages of ADHD drugs](#) contributed to increasing wait times for private providers. “Once the medication shortages hit and we had to stop treatment for thousands of people, the waiting list just went through the roof”, Cross said. In the same year, healthcare watchdog the Care Quality Commission rated [Psychiatry UK’s service](#) as ‘requires improvement’, and found the company had started to automate much of its payments and bookings systems to cope with the patient numbers.

Wait times for assessments are now around a year for many providers, and in May 2025, one NHS Trust – Coventry and Warwickshire – [announced it would stop accepting referrals](#) for ADHD assessments for adults over 25 to reduce waiting lists for children. Many patients report that their wait times have been complicated by external factors that were no fault of their own. [One Reddit user said](#) they had been kicked off their waiting list after moving house.

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Dr Cross says the current state of ADHD diagnosis means that “many individuals are left in indefinite limbo, denied an assessment unless their condition is considered an extreme crisis”. Despite ‘right to choose’ providers promising to reduce waiting lists, some private companies have made a lot of money from the NHS, while waiting times remain long. Without the NHS building internal capacity, it will likely continue to outsource ADHD services to private companies which can be driven by profit as much as patient care.

John Lubbock is a writer and filmmaker.