

Doctors back denial of treatment for smokers and the obese

Level 2 • Intermediate

1 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

rehabilitation

gluttony

obese

transplant

withhold

slim down

blackmail

legitimate

shift

rationing

1. An _____ person is too fat, in a way that is dangerous for their health. (title)
2. If you _____ something from someone, you deliberately do not give it to them. (para 1)
3. If you _____ someone, you use threats to persuade them to do what you want them to do. (para 2)
4. A _____ is a medical operation in which a new organ is put into someone's body. (para 3)
5. A _____ is a change in someone's ideas or opinions. (para 4)
6. If you _____, you lose weight. (para 5)
7. _____ is the process of returning to a healthy, independent and useful life after a serious illness or an operation. (para 7)
8. If something is described as _____, it is fair and reasonable. (para 7)
9. _____ is the bad habit of eating much more than you need to eat. (para 8)
10. _____ is the system of allowing people to have only a certain amount of something when there is not much available. (para 11)

2 Find the information

Find this information in the text as quickly as possible.

1. How many doctors took part in the survey?
2. What percentage answered 'yes' to the question mentioned in the text?
3. What does *NHS* stand for?
4. How much money must the NHS save by 2015?
5. In one area, how low must a patient's body mass index be before they can have a new hip or knee?
6. In another area, how long do patients have to keep their weight down before they receive treatment?

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Denis Campbell
29 April, 2012

- 1 A majority of UK doctors supports the denial of treatment to smokers and the obese, according to a recent survey. About 54% of the doctors who took part in the survey said the National Health Service (NHS) should have the right to withhold non-emergency treatment from patients who do not lose weight or stop smoking.
- 2 Some doctors believe operations do not work so well in patients with unhealthy lifestyles and that the health service should not waste money on these people. However, senior doctors and patient groups are worried about what they call "blackmailing" of the sick, and denial of their human rights.
- 3 Five hundred and ninety-three (54%) of the 1,096 doctors who took part in the survey answered 'yes' when asked: "Should the NHS be allowed to refuse non-emergency treatments to patients unless they lose weight or stop smoking?" One doctor said the NHS was right to expect an obese patient or alcoholic to change their behaviour before they had liver transplant surgery.
- 4 Dr Tim Ringrose of Doctors.net.uk said the results were a significant shift in doctors' thinking caused by the need for the NHS to save £20 billion by 2015. "This might appear to be only a small majority of doctors in favour of limiting treatment to some patients, but it is a major shift for a profession that has always tried to provide free healthcare from the cradle to the grave," he said.
- 5 Smokers and obese people are already being denied operations such as IVF (in vitro fertilization), breast reconstructions and a new hip or knee in some parts of England. In one area, obese patients cannot get hip and knee surgery until they slim down by 10% or have a body mass index of under 35. In another, they have to lose 5% of their body weight and keep their weight down for at least six months before they can receive treatment.
- 6 But Dr Clare Gerada of the Royal College of General Practitioners said the survey results were "very disturbing". She said: "The NHS should deliver care according to need. There is no medical justification for these restrictions on smokers, as giving up nicotine would not necessarily make an operation successful." Doctors should not support such bans unless there was strong evidence that stopping smoking reduces the patient's risk of suffering complications or dying, she added.
- 7 But obesity was different, she said. "Operating on a very fat person is more dangerous. The surgery is harder and the rehabilitation takes longer. So it's medically legitimate not to treat some very overweight people. But it should not be done for social reasons," she said.
- 8 A spokesman for the National Obesity Forum, said doctors who support bans "are totally out of order. There's no way that someone who is obese can be denied initial treatment by the NHS – that would be totally unjustified. There are many reasons why people are fat and gluttony is only one of them. The NHS should not discriminate against fat people because of their fatness. That would be a denial of their basic human rights."
- 9 The Royal College of Physicians, which represents hospital doctors, said it was against the idea. "Some lifestyles will have an impact on the success of treatments; for example, if someone weighs 150 kilograms, that may have an impact. Lifestyles contribute to risk and sometimes they may make treatments too risky. But that's quite different from saying, 'I'm not going to give you surgery because you smoke or are overweight'," said a spokesman.
- 10 The Department of Health agreed. "The individual needs of patients must be taken into account," said a spokeswoman. "But there can be clinical reasons to ask someone to take action such as losing weight or stopping smoking before surgery because the risk of surgery can become greater."
- 11 Dr Mark Porter, Chairman of the British Medical Association's consultants committee, said treatment bans were unacceptable. But he added: "There are times when a doctor may advise an obese person to lose weight before surgery can safely take place. This is a clinical decision, not a rationing decision."

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3 Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the text?

1. Smokers and obese people cannot get medical treatment in the UK.
2. Many doctors believe non-emergency treatment should not be given to patients unless they lose weight or stop smoking.
3. In one area of the UK, patients have to lose 10% of their weight before they can have a new hip or knee.
4. Giving up smoking guarantees that operations will be successful.
5. It is more dangerous to operate on an obese person than on a healthy person.
6. Obesity is only caused by gluttony.

4 Find the word

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the text?

1. a noun meaning someone *who finds it difficult to control the amount of alcohol they drink* (para 3)
2. a six-word expression meaning *through your whole life* (para 4)
3. a noun meaning *one of two joints on either side of your body between the waist and the top of your legs* (para 5)
4. a three-word expression meaning *a measurement of the amount of fat in someone's body, calculated by dividing their weight in kilograms by their height in metres squared* (para 5)
5. an adjective meaning *making you feel very worried or upset* (para 6)
6. a four-word expression meaning *completely wrong in opinions and behaviour* (para 8)
7. a noun meaning *effect or influence* (para 9)
8. a three-word expression meaning *to consider when you are making a decision* (para 10)

5 Suffixes

Use these suffixes to complete the words from the text. In two cases, you also need to change the spelling of the first part.

-ment

-ful

-ity

-ant

-able

-ion

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| 1. obese_____ | 4. consult_____ |
| 2. operate_____ | 5. treat_____ |
| 3. unaccept_____ | 6. success_____ |

6 Word-building

Complete the tables with words from the text.

	verb	noun
1.	weigh	
2.	behave	
3.	justify	

	verb	noun
4.	complicate	
5.	restrict	
6.	deny	

7 Discussion

Should smokers and obese people be denied medical treatment? Why? Why not?

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KEY

1 Key words

1. obese
2. withhold
3. blackmail
4. transplant
5. shift
6. slim down
7. rehabilitation
8. legitimate
9. gluttony
10. rationing

2 Find the information

1. 1,096
2. about 54%
3. National Health Service
4. £20 billion
5. under 35
6. at least six months

3 Comprehension check

1. F
2. T
3. T
4. F
5. T
6. F

4 Find the word

1. alcoholic
2. from the cradle to the grave
3. hip
4. body mass index
5. disturbing
6. totally out of order
7. impact
8. take into account

5 Suffixes

1. obesity
2. operation
3. unacceptable
4. consultant
5. treatment
6. successful

6 Word-building

1. weight
2. behaviour
3. justification
4. complication
5. restriction
6. denial