

# Smokers face breath tests before surgery: Patients will have to prove they have quit before being referred for an operation

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10/18/2017

Smokers are to be breathalysed to prove they have quit before being referred for surgery.

Obese patients will also be told they cannot have an operation unless they [lose weight](#).

The drastic policies are being rolled out in two health trusts, which serve 1.2million people.



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Smokers are to be breathalysed to prove they have quit before being referred for surgery (stock image)

Patients who smoke will be breathalysed to check they have given up before being referred, while those who are obese must lose 10 per cent of their weight.

Doctors claimed it was the latest example of rationing which is becoming 'more commonplace' across the NHS. The two trusts, East and North Hertfordshire and Herts Valleys Clinical Commissioning Groups, are trying to save £68 million this year.

Any patient who is obese – with a body mass index above 30 – will have to shed at least 10 per cent of their body weight before being referred for non-urgent surgery.

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Under the proposals, which were uncovered by the Health Service Journal, smokers must quit completely and doctors won't just take their word on it. They will be breathalysed to monitor levels of carbon monoxide in blood, to ensure they are telling the truth.

A spokesman for the Clinical Commissioning Groups said patients who hadn't reformed their lifestyles would only be referred in urgent cases.

He said: 'In exceptional circumstances, clinicians will allow surgery to go ahead even if the smoking and weight loss criteria are not met.

'Exceptions would be made when waiting for surgery would be more harmful for the patient.'

Ian Eardley, of the Royal College of Surgeons, said: 'Singling out patients in this way goes against the principles of the NHS.



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Doctors claimed it was the latest example of rationing which is becoming 'more commonplace' across the NHS

'While it is right that patients are supported to lose weight or stop smoking, this should not be a condition of them receiving surgery.

'This goes against clinical guidance and leaves patients waiting long periods of time in pain and discomfort. It can even lead to worse outcomes following surgery in some cases. We are concerned that the policies in Hertfordshire are just the tip of the iceberg.'

Last month a health trust in East Yorkshire said obese patients and smokers would be sent on a six-month 'health optimisation' boot camp before being referred.

And last year an investigation by the Royal College of Surgeons found that up to three million patients were being refused routine operations unless they lost weight or quit smoking.

But this is the first time a health trust has asked patients to prove they have given up smoking. A spokesman from East and North Hertfordshire CCG said the measures were intended to improve patient health and not to save money.

Simon Clark, director of the smokers' group Forest, said: 'Forcing smokers to take a breath test is not only heavy-handed, it's a gross intrusion of privacy.'

'If adults choose to ignore advice to quit smoking that's a matter for them. They shouldn't be treated like criminals and denied treatment.'

'The NHS is becoming more like Big Brother every day.'