



**Decision by Joint Committee of the Hertfordshire Valleys and the East and North Hertfordshire Clinical Commissioning Groups to Restrict Access to Elective Surgery on the Basis of Body Mass Index: A Joint Response and Position Statement from the Association for the Study of Obesity, the British Obesity and Metabolic Surgery Society**

The Association for the Study of Obesity (ASO) is the UK's foremost charitable organisation dedicated to the scientific understanding, prevention and treatment of obesity. Among the aims and objectives of the ASO are the promotion of evidence-based actions to prevent and treat obesity, the provision of opinion leadership on issues related to obesity and the support of patient and public involvement in obesity research and treatment.

The ASO accepts that within a modern NHS system, health care decision makers face complex issues that affect priority setting. However we strongly reject the recent joint decision of the Hertfordshire Valleys and the East and North Hertfordshire CCG's to restrict access to elective surgery based on body mass index (BMI) and the need to lose weight prior to surgery.

Justifying the rationing of treatment on the grounds of individual responsibility is not a fair or legitimate approach and, unfortunately, obesity is a commonly misunderstood disease for which the concept of individual responsibility often plays a prominent role. It is over-simplistic and inaccurate to argue that people with obesity are responsible for their excess weight and the evidence shows very clearly that weight gain is caused and maintained by a complex interplay of factors including genetics, family, social and environmental circumstances.

There is no strong evidence to suggest that clinical outcomes will be worse in the population of patients with a BMI greater than 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup> and post-surgery we would reasonably anticipate that, in some patients with obesity (e.g. those requiring joint replacement), mobility, physical activity, pain and quality of life would improve. To suggest that individuals with obesity need to lose weight to be considered for surgery goes against the existing scientific evidence base and the founding principles of the NHS. It is also unreasonable to deny surgery on the basis of excess weight when it is very clear that the availability of NHS weight management services across the UK are insufficient to manage the very large number of people who would benefit from this service.

The ASO considers the decision of the Hertfordshire Valleys and the East and North Hertfordshire CCG's to be discriminatory and may inadvertently increase the stigma associated with obesity. It is, therefore, morally wrong to imply that patients with a BMI more than 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup> are not entitled to health care. The ASO believes that health care resources should be allocated on the basis of evidence of clinical and cost-effectiveness and on the concept of health care need.

The ASO calls on the Secretary of State for Health Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt to intervene in order to reduce the stigmatisation of obesity and tackle the chronic underfunding of obesity services and research.

**The Board of Trustees, UK Association for the Study of Obesity (ASO)**

**Endorsed by:**

British Dietetic Association (BDA)

British Obesity and Metabolic Surgery Society (BOMSS)

British Psychological Society (BPS)

European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO)

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