Fat-fighting team goes into action amid ballooning costs for surgery

NHS targets resort’s 8,700 heavyweights

By EMMA HARRIS
Health Writer

A FAT-FIGHTING scheme is being launched in Blackpool in a bid to combat obesity. Health chiefs say there’s around 8,700 people who are obese in Blackpool.

They claim the specialist weight management service could save the NHS in Blackpool around £413,000 a year.

It includes behaviour therapy and physical activity sessions as well as advice about nutrition.

But the criteria for patients able to have weight loss surgery are being made tougher.

Classed

Health bosses say there are ever-increasing demands for surgery for obese patients and the strain on the NHS will get worse – including costs. People are classed as obese if they have a body mass index (BMI) of more than 35. But managers are increasing the threshold for people to be eligible for surgery, from a BMI of 40 to 50, or 45 if they have other medical life-threatening conditions.

Patients will also have had to have been actively engaged with NHS weight loss services for at least six months, but failed to achieve and sustain weight loss of at least 10 per cent.

They should also have tried other measures, such as medication, in the last 12 months for at least six months, with no success.

Weight loss surgery is predicted, in the short term, to cost £2m more this year than last in Cumbria and Lancashire.

It is forecast the increase by 2013 would be cost an extra £5m.

Dr Arif Rajpura, director of public health for NHS Blackpool, said: “The current levels of surgery are not going to be sustainable going into the future.”

“We have to think about how else we can deal with this population.”

Surgery alone is not a sustainable option for managing severe obesity. Patients require a credible non-surgical service.”

The new criteria was recommended by the Cumbria and Lancashire commissioning board and approved by NHS Blackpool.

Dr Amanda Doyle, of NHS Blackpool, said the move was not just about saving money.

Complex

She added: “It’s not purely a financial issue, it’s very complex.”

“Other factors do come in, such as the potential risks associated with surgery versus the benefits of surgery.”

“It’s just part of actions needed to deal with the problem.”

Dr Rajpura added: “It is a big and complicated issue.”

“It is an issue to do with the whole of our society and our modern lifestyles.

“We are totally dependent on our cars, that our transport is not conducive to cycling, walking or preventative feeding and infant nutrition – because it starts early and we are seeing a rise in the number of overweight infants.”

“The time has come where we have to do something to tackle it.”

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