

# GPs spending £1bn a year on insulin treatments

**Chris Smyth**

One in 20 prescriptions written by GPs is for diabetes drugs after an 80 per cent rise in the past decade.

Treatments for the condition cost family doctors almost £1 billion a year, one in every nine pounds they spend on medicines.

The figures led to calls for tougher action against obesity, one of the leading causes of diabetes, amid warnings that the NHS was struggling to cope

with a rising tide of avoidable ill health. Diabetes is the result of a lack of insulin or resistance to it, leading to difficulty in controlling blood sugar. More than three million people are known to have the condition and nine in ten cases are type 2, which is linked to excess weight.

In 2016-17 GPs wrote 52 million prescriptions for insulin and medicines to control sugar in the blood, up from 29 million ten years earlier. This outstrips the overall rise in prescriptions, up 46 per cent to 1.1 billion in the same

period. Tam Fry, chairman of the National Obesity Forum, said: "This rise in the diabetes drugs bill is another tragic consequence of successive UK governments failing to tackle obesity... Since 82 per cent of obese children grow into obese adults, with a high percentage of them acquiring diabetes, you can bet on the drugs bill escalating exponentially. If nothing else breaks the NHS, this treatment will."

Last year Theresa May ripped up a plan for tough curbs on the promotion

of junk food drawn up by her predecessor, to the alarm of many in the health service.

Simon Stevens, head of NHS England, is expanding cooking and exercise classes for hundreds of thousands of the overweight at risk of diabetes in an effort to head off further rises.

Simon O'Neill, of the charity Diabetes UK, said that prevention was "vital" but argued that it was good to see prescriptions rising to make sure patients keep their illness under control.

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