

Cancer patients left in pain by NHS cuts

Chris Smyth Health Editor

Tens of thousands of cancer, heart and hernia patients are in pain because an NHS cost-cutting drive has denied them an effective treatment, experts say.

GPs are unable to prescribe local-anaesthetic patches, doctors from almost every pain clinic in England say in a letter to *The Times*. They say that patients are being left without pain

relief or are forced on to potentially dangerous opioid painkillers.

Lidocaine plasters were one of the "low-value" treatments that GPs were told by NHS England last year not to prescribe routinely because of concerns that they were overusing them for conditions in which they do little good, such as back pain. The 114 specialists say that this has become a blanket ban on cases in which the plasters are the only option to relieve localised pain.

Women who have had mastectomies and those with abdominal scarring after surgery are among those who benefit, they say. Last year the NHS spent £19 million on GP prescriptions for the plasters, which cost £52 for a month's supply.

Julie Wood, of NHS Clinical Commissioners, insisted that it was not meant as a blanket ban, with exceptional cases still allowed after scrutiny.

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daily Mail August 15 2018