

NHS bosses refuse to fund thyroid weight control drug

By Henry Bodkin

PATIENTS suffering from thyroid conditions routinely face weight gain because NHS bosses refuse to pay for unnecessarily expensive life-changing drugs, a report has found.

An investigation commissioned by the Department of Health and Social Care revealed that potentially thousands of patients were being left to battle excess weight as well as diabetes, depression and heart problems because of the back-door rationing.

Between one and two in every 100 people in the UK suffers from an underactive thyroid, known as hypothyroidism, an endocrine system disorder where the thyroid gland does not produce enough of the hormones needed to regulate metabolism.

Around 20 per cent of these require liothyronine, which costs less than 16p to manufacturer but which until last year the NHS had paid ~~£9.22 for~~.

The report found evidence that local healthcare commissioners were refusing to pay for the medication, despite national guidance that they should.

It means patients were forced to endure the life-changing consequences of untreated hypothyroidism or pay for the drug themselves.

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, who campaigns for better treatment for thyroid patients, said: "It's not acceptable that vulnerable people are getting caught up in something that should have easily been avoided."

The report, which relied on interviews with more than 400 patients, has been passed to national NHS leaders.

Last year liothyronine appeared in a NHS England consultation that considered whether to cease payment for various drugs and treatments.

In the end it was decided the medication should continue to be funded, however the report speculated that local leaders may have taken advantage of the uncertainty to introduce their own rationing.

Dr Krishna Chatterjee, professor of endocrinology and president of the British Thyroid Association, said: "The current uncertainty, with liothyronine-treated individuals either being denied ongoing prescriptions or needing to source the treatment themselves at their own cost, seems very much against patients' interests."

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