

Doctors back denial of treatment for smokers and the obese with useful language for generalising and hedging

To be used with:

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2012/apr/28/doctors-treatment-denial-smokers-obese>)

Discuss this statement in pairs: “The National Health Service should be allowed to refuse non-emergency treatments to patients unless they lose weight or stop smoking.”

Try to predict these things about that question:

- Which people support that statement?
- What are the arguments in support of that point of view?
- Which groups of people are against that statement?
- What are the arguments against refusal of non-emergency treatments?
- Which people have a more nuanced view/ a more mixed view of that question?
- What are their balanced views between accepting or rejecting the statement?

Read the text and compare what it says with your predictions.

Are the following statements true, according to the text?

- Senior doctors and patient groups are opposed to the statement.
- The doctors surveyed thought the NHS was right to expect an obese patient or alcoholic to change their behaviour before they had liver transplant surgery.
- Dr Tim Ringrose of Doctors.net.uk thinks doctors should provide free healthcare from the cradle to the grave.
- The doctors surveyed thought smokers and obese people should be denied operations such as IVF, breast reconstructions and a new hip or knee.
- The doctors surveyed thought obese people should slim down by 10%, have a body mass index of under 35 or lose 5% of their body weight and keep their weight down for at least 6 months before they can get hip or knee surgery.
- The spokesman for the National Obesity Forum thinks that most fat people are not fat due to gluttony (= greediness).

Change the statements above so that they exactly agree with the text.

Put these expressions into order from the smallest at the bottom to the biggest at the top, perhaps thinking about what the actual numbers could be if you aren't sure:

- A couple of doctors/ obese people
 - A few doctors/ obese people
 - A majority of doctors/ obese people
 - A small majority of doctors/ obese people
 - A tiny minority of doctors/ obese people
 - Another doctor/ obese person
 - Doctors/ Obese people
 - Many doctors/ obese people
 - One doctor/ obese person
 - Only one of the doctors/ obese people
 - Some doctors/ obese people
 - The vast majority of doctors/ obese people
-
- A huge change
 - A major change
 - A small change
 - A tiny change
 - No change
 - Quite a big change
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- Incredibly disturbing
 - Not disturbing
 - Not very disturbing
 - Quite disturbing
 - Slightly disturbing
 - Very disturbing

Check your answers as a class, then use similar language to talk about topics from here:

- Obesity and related medical problems
- Deaths from smoking
- Alcohol abuse and related medical problems
- Testing of drugs on animals
- Cloning
- Test tube babies
- Genetic testing of babies in the womb
- Bribes to doctors
- Power of the pharmaceutical companies
- Rising costs of medical care
- Side effects of drugs
- Commercial pressures on drug companies
- The placebo effect
- People without health insurance

For homework, prepare to speak about two of the topics above, including how big a problem each is and is likely to be in the future.