

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Miss Clare Marx CBE DL PRCS

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Dr Tim Burke
Chair, NEW Devon CCG
Newcourt House
Old Rydon Lane
Exeter
Devon
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Dear Dr Burke

Open letter: RCS Concerns on introduction of restrictions on elective surgery

Your recent decision to place restrictions on access to all elective surgical procedures for patients within the North, East and West (NEW) Devon CCG area is of great concern to the RCS.

We believe patients' access to treatment must be based on clinical assessment and patient decision. This should involve an informed discussion between the clinician and patient to assess clinical need, suitability for surgery and the patient's choice. As the Government has said, it is unacceptable if organisations 'are rationing on the basis of financial considerations'¹.

Restricting access to elective procedures, such as hip and knee replacements or hernia surgery, can impact on the patient's quality of life and the eventual outcome of surgery. There is also a potential risk to patient safety in some cases.. While we recognise NEW Devon CCG's significant financial pressures, delaying treatment risks increasing a patient's clinical problems and therefore potentially increasing the overall cost of healthcare. New Devon CCG's short term measures are not a sustainable solution. A blanket ban is too rigid and only acts to arbitrarily deny patients the care they may need.

We agree that patients with a high BMI should attempt to lose weight, and smokers should stop smoking. However, NICE and other clinical guidance is clear that such criteria should not alone create a total barrier to surgery. The Royal College of Surgeons has produced clear guidance, accredited by NICE, to support the implementation of high value care pathways for planned operations. This guidance is available on our website.

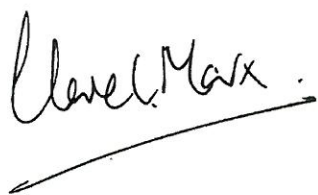
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¹ Hansard, HC Deb, 20 June 2012, c855.

We strongly urge you to reconsider your position. I would also be happy to facilitate a conversation with our regional South West professional affairs board, made up of leading local surgeons covering all surgical specialties, to discuss how else we can improve efficiency in surgery.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Clare Marx". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke.

Miss Clare Marx CBE DL PRCS
President