

# Sheffield hospitals plan to charge for non-medical circumcision

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Hospitals in Sheffield carry out about 200 non-medical male circumcisions a year, costing the Health Authority in the region of £170,000. Now, in an attempt to save money, the NHS Sheffield's Clinical Commissioning Group has proposed to make families who want their sons circumcised pay for the procedure. Each operation costs about £1,000.

But Coun Shaffaq Mohammed, who is a director at the Pakistan Muslim Centre in Sheffield, is worried about the potential knock-on effects.

He told [Postcode Gazette](#): "I'm very concerned. Whilst it may seem like an easy saving, this could lead to a serious increase in backstreet operations. This is a dangerous path to tread and as a result may actually lead to parents seeking emergency treatment and actually increase burden on the NHS."

Dr Margaret Ainger, a GP from Page Hall medical practice on Owler Lane and lead for children's services in the NHS Sheffield Clinical Commissioning Group, said: "We understand that for some, circumcisions are an important part of their religion and therefore our doctors are working with our key community groups on how best we could make advice and guidance available to those who need it. Conversations with these groups are planned and we are keen to get people involved in tailoring this advice."

The cut is set to come into force in the 2013/14 financial year. The commissioning group has been in discussions with Sheffield Children's Hospital about the possibility of instead providing a private service at the hospital.

A report to be presented at a council meeting next week states: "(The team is) exploring the potential to develop a service which will provide care under local anaesthetic on a private basis and paid for by the children's parents."

Dr Ainger added: "No decision has been made as of yet but we are exploring what options would be available to the Sheffield public by working in partnership with both the Children's Hospital and local authority to make sure that any family wishing to circumcise their sons have the best possible advice and guidance available."

Male circumcision, which is the surgical removal of the foreskin, is often carried out for non-medical reasons such as religious beliefs or personal preferences. It is common in both the Muslim and Jewish communities.

According to national guidelines from the Department of Health, circumcisions should not be funded when they are requested for non-medical reasons. The proposals bring Sheffield into line with this national guidance.

Dr Ainger said: "Non-therapeutic circumcisions are not clinical interventions and as a group, we would not want anybody to undergo a medical procedure if there was no specific clinical need."

Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, commented: "This is yet another example of public money being used for religious purposes. There is absolutely no need for children to be subjected to such a procedure – in fact there are plenty of arguments why they shouldn't be. The idea that scarce NHS funding is being used for something that has only religious and no medical significance is scandalous.

"There is however a real danger that those seeking circumcisions will turn to practitioners without medical qualifications. We call on the Government to amend Child protection legislation to make it unlawful for anyone other than qualified medical staff to circumcise minors for any reason. This is just a first step, though. We believe that non-therapeutic circumcision should not be permitted until the boy is old enough to give informed consent.

"Non-therapeutic infant circumcision is a breach of children's rights and it's time legislators reconsidered the current carte blanche afforded to infant circumcision on the basis that the parents' freedom of religion is the only consideration. This approach has already been taken by a Cologne Court and is backed by reputable medical bodies including the Royal Dutch Medical Association."

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