

## Ministers reject fines for 'cowboy Botox'

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A plan to fine "cowboy" cosmetic surgery practitioners has been rejected by ministers.

They have ruled out a clampdown on unlicensed Botox clinics, despite growing concerns over patient safety and a rise in cases of botched treatment.

Patients have been left scarred after visiting untrained high-street operators for Botox injections and wrinkle-fillers. High-profile cases include actress Lesley Ash, who was left with badly swollen lips when she suffered an allergic reaction to a collagen injection.

A system of fines to regulate non-surgical procedures was recommended by a panel of industry experts who were asked to draw up new measures.

But the Department of Health has ruled civil penalties would be too costly to implement. It also plans a U-turn on the regulation of clinics which offer laser and light treatments, including hair removal and skin resurfacing for patients scarred by acne.

At present, regulator the Healthcare Commission monitors clinics and beauty salons which offer these forms of treatment. But a consultation paper, due to be published at the end of the

month, will propose these checks be dropped because there is not enough evidence of health risks.

This has enraged cosmetic surgeons who say that leaving unscrupulous clinics free to operate would tarnish the reputation of the industry.

An industry source told the Evening Standard: "Those clinics that aren't licensed are going to be very happy. It looks like the current Government is not concerned with patient safety because it costs too much and they don't consider this a priority. "Self-regulation is of no value unless it has teeth."

Shadow health minister Mike Penning said it was "ridiculous" the Government had backed off taking tough measures.

"You just have to drive down the road in London to see beauty parlours offering everything from Botox to lunchtime surgery," he said.

"Unless you take this seriously you're not going to get the cowboys off the high street."

More than 700,000 cosmetic procedures were carried out last year. Three quarters were non-invasive. More than 20,000 clinics now offer Botox injections to smooth out wrinkles.

Last month, Superdrug became the first high street chemist to launch drop-in Botox treatment. The anti-wrinkle and lip-plumping procedures cost from £55 to almost £500.

However, surgeons have expressed concern that anyone can set up shop and offer treatments under current rules.

They have condemned home services which offer "Botox on a bike", where motorcycle couriers carry out home visits, and Botox parties where people are encouraged to drink champagne before going under the needle.

Another procedure, Isolagen, which was marketed as a way to "grow your own facelift", was withdrawn from the British market after 50 women who said they were injured by the product launched legal action.

The Department of Health said no decisions had been made on the future regulation of nonsurgical cosmetic laser treatments.

A spokesman said: "A balance will always need to be struck between the risk presented by a particular non-surgical cosmetic treatment and the cost to the publicly-funded regulatory body."

Douglas McGeorge, president of the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons, criticised the Government's refusal to get tough on "cowboy" operators.

He said: "We're not a police force - how can we tell people to stop practising unless there are proper penalties? The public will be paying the price for the lack of regulation."