

Last week, George Osborne announced plans to raise £500 million a year by adding VAT to cosmetic surgery. But is the so-called 'boob tax' a good idea or deeply misogynistic?



**YES**

says broadcaster and beauty columnist Sali Hughes

My immediate reaction on hearing the Government was proposing to add VAT to cosmetic surgery procedures was shock that it had been exempt in the first place. Beauty is a luxury, not a necessity. The ultimate expression of this is to permanently alter our imperfections, to stave off the ageing process via plastic surgery. For the vast majority of patients, this is about bigger boobs or fuller lips.

I don't judge women going under the knife. If plastic surgery makes you feel better and you can afford it, then go for it. But why on earth should you be exempt from the same tax I think nothing of paying on a new mascara or head of highlights?

Think about the other things that are VAT exempt: books, food (let's not forget that tampons aren't even considered essential enough for exemption). These aren't fripperies – they're the things families need to survive and grow. It's a damning indictment of feminism if we women think the act of cutting up our bodies to look prettier is an essential expense worthy of tax exemption.

No one appreciates more than I do that our appearance can directly affect the quality of our lives. There are, without question, people for whom plastic surgery is a necessity, for mental or physical health. Women having reconstructive surgery after breast cancer, children bullied relentlessly for protruding ears – all deserve treatment. And for these people, we have an amazing NHS that will perform plastic surgery for free. But when the rest of the NHS is on its knees, do I think we as a society should be worrying about accepting desperately needed VAT from non-essential private procedures undergone purely for the sake of vanity? Frankly, we've got much bigger fish to fry.



## SHOULD COSMETIC SURGERY BE TAXED?



**NO**

says beauty and health writer Leah Hardy

It seems like a no-brainer, doesn't it? Why not make bimbos with their 'glamour model' breasts pay towards the recession-hit NHS. But hang on, the ethics are more complex than that. Almost nobody, including me, objects to a 'Bo-tax' on fillers. But surgery is different. Every day, plastic surgeons see ordinary women with breasts so large they have constant back pain, or so asymmetrical that one side is AA, the other DD. They see women who, post-pregnancy, have large 'aprons' of overhanging skin that no sit-ups can improve. Other people may have livid scars that remind them of a trauma. For them, plastic surgery can provide huge psychological and physical benefits. You might assume the NHS would step in to help, but often not.

Surgeon Douglas McGeorge told me, 'Many of these operations were routine in the NHS but now have been excluded or rationed. Only 62% of areas allow tummy tucks and they all have different criteria.' So these people turn to the private sector to help them, thus saving the NHS money. If we price these people out of the regulated market by imposing taxes, many will, in desperation, find themselves in dodgy foreign hospitals having cut-price surgery, often with appalling results that go on to cost the NHS thousands in lifesaving treatment.

So can we just tax those who don't have any medical or psychological reasons for their surgery? That's almost impossible. How can surgeons prove that Patient A had her breasts reduced for purely medical reasons without releasing her medical records, which they have a legal duty to keep confidential? And the business of who would and would not be eligible for VAT exemption is even more complex when even so-called 'vanity' surgery, such as nose jobs, can turn depressed recluses into cheerful, productive people.

Should there be VAT on plastic surgery? Tell us at [feedback@graziemagazine.co.uk](mailto:feedback@graziemagazine.co.uk)