

Circumcision dangers spelt out



By BBC London's John McManus

Muslim boys in London are risking infection and mutilation by inexperienced and bogus circumcision practitioners.

Circumcision is widely practiced among Muslim communities, though the age at which boys are circumcised varies.

The practice is only available through the NHS if there are compelling medical reasons, though local GP's may carry out the operation themselves.

Problems arise when the procedure is carried out in an unsterile environment, such as the boy's home. This can leave the boys open to infection.

A bigger problem are the "community practitioners", people who have no medical training, who carry out the circumcisions themselves.

Crisis meeting

At a meeting held last week at the East London Mosque, concerned parents, community leaders and doctors gathered to try and find a solution to the problem.

The Royal London Hospital, which serves much of London's East End, treated 32 boys who were suffering from circumcision complications this summer.

Matthew Ryan from Tower Hamlets Community Health Council, said the Hospital experienced a flood of sick boys every summer, as parents had their children circumcised over the long summer holidays, to allow them time to heal.

And one Muslim parent told BBC London that his sons, aged 5 and 10, were left in agony after being circumcised by a "community practitioner".

Six people had to hold the boys down while they were circumcised without an anaesthetic, and his GP was horrified when he later examined the children.

The five-year-old eventually had to be kept isolated in hospital for 10 days while he recovered.

Within the law

Male circumcision, unlike the female variety, isn't illegal in Britain.

It's classed as "consensual assault", similar to tattooing, and anyone can legally carry it out.

If a GP is involved they must have had training.

Unlike other forms of medicine, no list of registered practitioners exists, which is why parents often turn to unqualified people recommended to them through the Muslim community.