

Lower Clinical Priority Policy

Repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation for Depression (rTMS)

Policy

Repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation for depression is considered a low priority treatment and will only be commissioned by the NHS on an individual case basis.

Clinicians need to apply to the Exceptional Cases Panel for approval of funding by completing the [funding request form](#).

It is the responsibility of referring and treating clinicians to ensure compliance with this policy.

Smoking:

Patients who smoke should be advised to attempt to stop smoking and referred to smoking cessation services – [see stop smoking policy](#).

Background

Repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation (rTMS) is a treatment usually considered in adult patients with primary depressive disorder and treatment resistant depression (limited or no improvement with conventional treatments).

rTMS was approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use in major depressive disorder in 2011 (see reference 1). NICE (2015) interventional procedures guidance (IPG) recommends that rTMS for depression may be used with normal arrangements for clinical governance and audit (see references 2 & 3).

In rTMS, repetitive pulses of electromagnetic energy are delivered via an electromagnetic coil held against the scalp with the intention of inducing electric currents in the cerebral cortex. rTMS does not need anaesthesia and can be performed on an outpatient basis.

Rationale and Evidence

rTMS techniques for major depressive disorder have been assessed in more than 50 RCTs (see reference 4 to 15). The vast majority applied HF-rTMS to the left dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC) is an area in the prefrontal cortex of the brain with positive outcomes for the active intervention compared to sham.

Whilst there is a growing body of evidence to support the use of rTMS in patients with depression as a monotherapy or as an adjunct with pharmacotherapy, further studies are required and are ongoing within this field; therefore, the treatment is still considered experimental.

Further studies are required to identify a specific target population group who have the greatest benefit from rTMS therapy; there needs to be a standardised protocol of administration on the most effective HF-rTMS parameters and the long-term durability of rTMS treatment for depression needs to be further explored.

Priority

Low priority treatment.

The evidence for rTMS for other indications has not currently been reviewed. However, until this is the case, rTMS is not funded for any other indication.

Glossary

Dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC):	An area in the prefrontal cortex of the brain.
High Frequency Repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (HF- rTMS):	rTMS using very high frequency pulses.
Repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (rTMS):	Non-invasive form of brain stimulation.

References

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