

# **Clinical Commissioning Policy: Deep Brain Stimulation for Central Post Stroke Pain**

Reference: NHS England: 16026/P



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**Additional Circulation List**

**Description** Not Routinely Commissioned - NHS England will not routinely commission this specialised treatment in accordance with the criteria described in this policy.

**Cross Reference** This document is part of a suite of policies with Gateway Reference 05527s.

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**Contact Details for further information** [england.specialisedcommissioning@nhs.net](mailto:england.specialisedcommissioning@nhs.net)

**Document Status**

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# Clinical Commissioning Policy: Deep Brain Stimulation for Central Post Stroke Pain

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**Prepared by NHS England Specialised Services Clinical Reference Group for  
Specialised Pain Services**

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## **Policy Statement**

NHS England will not routinely commission deep brain stimulation for central post stroke pain in accordance with the criteria outlined in this document. In creating this policy NHS England has reviewed this clinical condition and the options for its treatment. It has considered the place of this treatment in current clinical practice, whether scientific research has shown the treatment to be of benefit to patients, (including how any benefit is balanced against possible risks) and whether its use represents the best use of NHS resources. This policy document outlines the arrangements for funding of this treatment for the population in England.

## **Equality Statement**

Promoting equality and addressing health inequalities are at the heart of NHS England's values. Throughout the development of the policies and processes cited in this document, we have:

- Given due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity, and to foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic (as cited under the Equality Act 2010) and those who do not share it; and
- Given regard to the need to reduce inequalities between patients in access to, and outcomes from healthcare services and to ensure services are provided in an integrated way where this might reduce health inequalities

## **Plain Language Summary**

### **About central post-stroke pain**

Central post-stroke pain (CPSP) is a long term ('chronic') condition that affects around 12% of people who have a stroke.

- CPSP is a type of 'neuropathic pain' which means that you feel pain even though your body is not injured.
- People with CPSP may have a burning sensation, throbbing, shooting pains, pins and needles or numbness - this can affect different areas on the body.

### **About the current treatment**

- CPSP is often long term and the response to treatment with medicines may be poor. Some patients need very large doses of pain medicines - with very little benefit.
- Nearly all patients are affected by side effects - particularly a decline in memory and thinking skills (called 'cognitive impairment').

### **About the new treatment**

Deep brain stimulation (DBS) involves a device that delivers small electrical pulses to specific parts of the brain. The parts of the brain targeted are those involved in how we feel pain - the treatment aims to mask the pain by making other sensations such as buzzing or warmth in the painful area.

- The device is a bit like a heart pacemaker - instead of wires running into the heart, they go into the brain through small holes in the skull.
- This procedure can provide pain relief and reduce the need for treatment with medicines – however patients must be carefully selected.

### **What we have decided**

NHS England has carefully reviewed the evidence to treat central post-stroke pain with deep brain stimulation. We have concluded that there is not enough evidence to make the treatment available at this time.

## 1 Introduction

This document describes the evidence that has been considered by NHS England in formulating a proposal to not routinely commission deep brain stimulation for central post-stroke pain.

CPSP is a type of chronic neuropathic pain. This is long-term pain resulting from damage to the somatosensory nervous system as a result of a stroke, usually along the spinothalamocortical tract (Henry et al 2008). The location of pain is associated with the area of stroke lesion. Symptom severity and duration are often greater than for other types of pain, and pharmacological treatment is refractory for many patients, either because it is ineffective or because the side effects are intolerable. There have been no significant breakthroughs in the therapeutic options for patients with chronic neuropathic pain. There is an urgent (due to risk to self-harm) unmet clinical need for additional effective treatment, as CPSP has significant implications on quality of life, sleep, ability to work, and mood, sometimes leading to such extreme distress that patients contemplate, and may even commit, suicide.

DBS presents an alternative option, or at least adjunct, for patients who fail all conventional management, as it is more specific in inducing analgesia without the associated risks of pharmacotherapy. There may also be significant long-term benefits to the health system and economy of using DBS to treat medication refractory CPSP, as medication usage is likely to fall substantially and patients may be enabled to return to greater independence and employment. DBS is a surgical treatment involving the implantation of a medical device acting like a 'brain pacemaker', which sends electrical impulses to specific parts of the brain.

By targeting specific areas (typically in the thalamus and periventricular grey matter) that play a part in pain perception, or related limbic areas that mediate the unpleasantness of pain, this treatment has been used in the UK between May 1999 and April 2013 for chronic pain with success in selected patients, including those with CPSP and was funded by some CCGs/PCTs.

## 2 Definitions

Central Post-Stroke Pain: is a chronic neuropathic pain caused by cerebrovascular lesions of the central somatosensory nervous system. Breaking down this definition further, chronic pain is defined as 'pain that persists for more than 6 months' and neuropathic pain is defined as 'pain in the corresponding area of the body that is caused by a lesion or disease of the somatosensory nervous system'.

Deep Brain Stimulation (DBS) involves the surgical implantation of a medical device like a 'brain pacemaker', which sends small electrical impulses to specific parts of the brain. DBS leads are placed in the brain in precise locations that depend on the type of symptoms to be addressed.

## 3 Aims and Objectives

This policy proposition aims to define NHS England's commissioning position on deep brain stimulation for central post stroke pain (CPSP).

The objectives are to improve patients' quality of life through DBS in those cases in which CPSP has not responded to other treatments.

## 4 Epidemiology and Needs Assessment

Central post-stroke pain (CPSP) has been defined by the International Association for the study of Pain as "chronic neuropathic pain caused by cerebrovascular lesions of the central somatosensory nervous system" (IASP 2014). CPSP prevalence amongst stroke patients ranges between 1 and 12% according to different estimates (Hosomi et al 2015). The wide range of the estimated prevalence arises as a result of different populations of patient studied and different tools for assessing pain severity.

1. An observational descriptive study of the epidemiology and treatment of stroke in a UK general population conducted in 2013 assessed the burden



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of central post- stroke pain in the UK and the numbers of patients likely to be eligible for DBS for CPSP annually. There are approximately 142,000 strokes in the UK/year and around 50,000 stroke victims die shortly afterwards. Of the 92,000 who survive, 30% (27,600) make full recovery, 65% (60,000) are disabled, and 5% (4,600) develop CPSP (source: The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, 2014; Stroke Association 2013). This estimate is supported by findings in other published studies (e.g. Andersen et al 1995). Of the 4,600 with CPSP, around 80% will fail best medical therapy, leaving 3,680 who could potentially benefit from DBS. However, of these, at least 30% (1100) are expected to be medically unfit for surgery, giving an estimate of 2,500 potentially fit for referral for DBS annually in the UK. Some of these patients would not consider their medically refractory pain sufficiently severe to undergo surgery and a significant proportion of those fit for surgery will remain on best alternative therapies and refuse surgery because of the risk of the operation. Further patients would be excluded due to contraindications picked up during the assessment process including psychological and cognitive factors which might prevent their ability to safely use the DBS system and inability to comply with long term follow up.

2. To put these numbers into the context of the Oxford experience, from 1999-2013, the Oxford functional neurosurgery department was referred about four patients per week for pain DBS. Of the patients referred, one in three was accepted for consideration of DBS and one in three of those assessed went on to have DBS implanted. Approximately a third of the total Oxford cohort who received DBS for chronic pain had CPSP, although if CPSP had been the only indication for referral it is probable that more CPSP cases would have been accepted.

Based on the natural disease progression and epidemiology (point 1, above) combined with estimated figures of how many patients are excluded from DBS *after referral* during the process of screening referrals and patient assessment (point 2, above) it is estimate that around 100 patients nationally each year would have both a clinical indication for DBS surgery, be willing to undergo the treatment and would have no medical or psychosocial contraindications to the procedure.

DBS has provided therapeutic benefits for otherwise treatment resistant movement disorders including Parkinson's disease, dystonia, and tremor, where it is currently routinely commissioned. In England there are 12 centres that perform DBS, but only one is using it for the management of pain, the other centres use it for other indications as above thus historical experience in Oxford is likely to predict future surgical numbers. However, it is anticipated that the prevalence of stroke will increase due to expected demographic changes and with a reduction in mortality the number of people requiring DBS for CPSP is anticipated to increase.

The patients with CPSP who are considered for DBS are those who have tried and failed, are inappropriate for or are having significant side effects with all other standard interventions. As such it is a complex group of patients with pain having a major impact on their function, quality of life and requirement for social and healthcare support. Relatively small improvements in pain may have a life-changing impact in this patient group which may be better reflected by changes in self-reported quality of life scores rather than pain assessment scales.

## **5 Evidence Base**

NHS England has concluded that there is insufficient evidence to support a proposal for the routine commissioning of this treatment for the indication.

The reference baseline for this policy was the NICE (IPG 382) guidance published in March 2011. NICE in 2011, endorsed that DBS for refractory chronic pain syndromes could be used in patients selected by a specialised pain MDT, when other treatments had failed to control their pain, provided informed consent, clinical governance, patient information and audit arrangements were in place. The evidence available to support routine commissioning is limited due to the small number of patients suitable for this intervention and the limited number of centres involved.

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A further review was carried out within the functional neurosurgery department in Oxford by Sethi, Roy, Aziz et al looking only at studies published after the NICE review. It identified smaller case series that provide positive evidence about the efficacy of DBS for CPSP (Rezaei-Haddad et al 2015, Alves et al 2011, Mallory et al. 2012, Hunsche et al 2013) as well as a study finding positive quality of life outcomes after DBS for pain which included patients with CPSP (Gray et al 2014). These additional studies add new evidence in relation to quality of life or cognitive outcomes. The two noteworthy trials identified in this review are described below:

The first reported a perspective case series of 18 patients with neuropathic pain (Gray et al.), which included patients with CPSP (27.7% of the sample). Although the sample size was small due to the nature of these conditions and the supportive medications accompanying DBS were not recorded, significant improvements following DBS of the periventricular/periaqueductal grey area and sensory thalamus were observed with a; 44.7% mean reduction in subjective pain intensity (MPQ), 25.8% reduction in total disability score (FLP), 20.8% reduction in HADS depression and anxiety score at 6 months following surgery. Although post-surgery scores on all cognitive measures were not significantly different to pre-surgery levels, DBS in PVG/PAG was observed to be associated with a deterioration in executive function (spatial working memory) particularly among those reporting the greatest pain alleviation (39% of the sample reported a 50% reduction in pain).

The second was a case series of 4 patients with intractable pharmaceutical therapy resistant thalamic pain affecting the whole hemi-body, lasting more than 2 years (Hunsche et al). 3 of these patients had post-stroke pain. Patients were assessed at 3, 6 and 12 months. 3 / 4 patients achieved long-lasting pain relief of more than 40%, at 3, 6 and 12 months of follow-up post DBS.

The conclusions of the Gray and Hunsche papers may differ because the approach of the two groups is different in some key aspects. For example, the Gray et al paper reports outcomes from a group where drug reduction is not insisted upon after DBS for pain, whereas drug reduction is typical in the management of patients reported by the Hunsche group. Also, Hunsche et al set a limit of 40% reduction in VAS score to signify significant reduction in pain, and this was the main outcome measure they assessed. The Gray et al group used a

greater number and range of outcome measures and did not set a fixed percentage change as a threshold for success.

### **Clinical Effectiveness**

There was one systematic review. It included an earlier systematic review and meta-analysis which may have been misreported and contained an important methodological limitation. It suggested an overall success rate for DBS in CPSP of 31%. The only other studies included in this systematic review are described below.

There were four uncontrolled studies with ten or more participants:

The first reported a series of 15 people with CPCP treated with DBS in Oxford. Three noticed no improvement and their electrodes were removed. The remaining twelve reported a mean improvement of 49% in their pain.

Pain ratings improved by 38%. Seven participants stopped all analgesics and five others stopped regular opiates.

The same research group reported a series of 18 people with CPSP. Six noticed no improvement after DBS and their electrodes were removed, and three were lost to follow-up. Pain severity in the remaining nine participants showed mean improvement of 49%; the significance of this result was not reported. Four of the nine reported improvement in pain severity of at least 50%. The participants in this study may have also been reported in the first study.

The third study reported a series of 31 people with CPSP treated with DBS. This study was also from the same research group in Oxford and apparently included all the participants in the earlier two studies. Results were similar: four patients did not benefit from DBS and the electrodes were removed, sixteen reported an improvement in their health status and in their pain, seven had permanent electrodes but no improvement in health and the remaining four were lost to follow-up.

Rasche et al reported a separate set of eleven patients treated in Germany.

Nine of the eleven participants experienced no pain improvement and had their electrodes removed. Patients' quality of life did not improve because of "persistent chronic burning pain component and intermittent lancinating pain attacks."

### **Cost Effectiveness**

There were no health economic evaluations of DBS for CPSP.

### **Safety**

Complications were not widely reported in the studies that found. NICE's guidance refers to the risks of intracranial haemorrhage, massive cerebral oedema and haematoma in the basal ganglia, infection, ventriculitis, subgaleal infection, subdural empyema and erosion of hardware.

## **6 Documents which have informed this Policy**

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence Interventional procedure Guidance 382. Deep brain stimulation for refractory chronic pain syndromes (excluding headache). London: NICE, 2011. [www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ipg382](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ipg382)

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National Institute for Health and Care Excellence Technology Appraisal 159. Spinal Cord Stimulation for Chronic Pain of Neuropathic or Ischaemic origin. 2008.

## **7 Date of Review**

This document will be reviewed when information is received which indicates that the policy requires revision.

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