

Changes to commissioned treatments for patients with Chronic Cervical (Neck) and Thoracic (Upper Back) Pain in North West London

Information for Patients and Public

Planned Procedures with a Threshold Policy Implementation

V2 July 2018

1. What is chronic cervical and thoracic pain?

Chronic cervical pain is pain coming from the joints, muscles or bones of the neck, which has lasted for more than three months.

Chronic thoracic pain is pain coming from the joints, muscles or bones of the upper back, which has lasted for more than three months.

2. Which treatments are subject to change?

Changes are being made to:

- **cervical and thoracic facet joint injections** and
- **therapeutic medial branch block injections.**

Cervical and thoracic facet joint injections are injections into the joints in the spine in the neck and upper back. The injections were given to help manage pain.

Therapeutic medial branch block injections are similar injections that are placed outside the joints near the nerve (medial branch nerve). The injections were given to help manage pain.

3. What is changing?

The North West (NW) London Policy Development Group advised that these procedures lack clinical effectiveness. This means that they do not work well enough or last long enough to justify the risks and costs involved.

The NW London Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) have therefore introduced a new clinical policy to discontinue their use.

The following policy was adopted across NW London on 1 July 2018.

“NW London CCGs do not commission Facet Joint Injections or Therapeutic Medial Branch Block Injections for chronic pain in the cervical or thoracic spine. Funding may be considered through the Individual Funding Request (IFR) route in exceptional circumstances.”

For more information on the policy and other treatment options, please use the link below:

<http://www.hounslowccg.nhs.uk/media/111741/Cervical-Thoracic-Facet-joint-injections-Medial-Branch-Blocks-Policy-v41.pdf>

4. What does this mean for patients?

From 1 July 2018 patients will no longer be referred for cervical or thoracic facet joint injections or therapeutic medial branch block injections. Patients already receiving or booked for these treatments should have their notes reviewed by their current hospital or community provider to check if any other available options could be appropriate for them. The treatment options should be discussed between the clinician and the patient. If no appropriate treatment options are available, then the patient will be discharged back to their GP for further management.

5. What alternatives may be available for patients?

Alternative treatment options may include exercises such as stretching, strengthening, aerobic, yoga, or Tai Chi. Manual therapy and psychological approaches may also be considered alongside an exercise programme. A combined physical and psychological pain management programme incorporating a cognitive behavioural approach may be offered.

Radiofrequency denervation is an injection that uses heat generated by a radio frequency current to destroy the nerves that carry pain signals. Radiofrequency denervation can be effective for some people, and if your doctor, physiotherapist or hospital specialist feels that this could be appropriate for you, you may be referred to a pain clinic for assessment for this procedure.

The **back pain guide** on NHS Choices lets patients explore information on different types of back and neck pain, how to prevent it, and advice on exercises and treatment.

Back pain guide: <https://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/Back-pain-guide.aspx>

Neck pain exercises: <http://www.csp.org.uk/publications/neck-pain-exercises>

6. Are there any exceptions to the policy?

If the patient's GP or hospital specialist feels that the patient has a clinically exceptional reason to receive the treatments covered by the new NW London policy, then they may submit a request through the Individual Funding Request (IFR) route with an email to ppwtnw.london@nhs.net.

Further information on the IFR process can be found at the link below:

<http://www.hounslowccg.nhs.uk/what-we-do/individual-funding-requests-and-ppwt.aspx>