

Understanding NICE guidance

Information for people who use NHS services

Structural neuroimaging for examining people who have had a first episode of psychosis

NICE 'technology appraisal guidance' advises on when and how drugs and other treatments and procedures should be used in the NHS.

This leaflet is about when **structural neuroimaging** should be used to examine people who have had a first episode of psychosis in the NHS in England and Wales. It explains guidance (advice) from NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence). It is written for people who have had their first episode of psychosis but it may also be useful for their families or carers or anyone with an interest in the condition.

It does not describe psychosis or the examinations in detail – a member of your healthcare team should discuss these with you. Some sources of further information and support are on the back page.

What has NICE said?

Structural neuroimaging, using methods called magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) or computed axial tomography (CT) scanning, is not recommended for use routinely to examine all people who have had a first episode of psychosis.

First-episode psychosis

Psychosis is a condition that affects a person's mind, causing changes in how they think, feel and behave. A person who has psychotic symptoms often has difficulty telling what is real from what is not real and may have delusions (unusual or illogical beliefs) or hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that others can't). Symptoms are often unfamiliar and frightening, and may leave the person confused and distressed.

First-episode psychosis refers to the first time a person experiences psychotic symptoms. This includes people who have recently had their first psychotic episode but can also include those who have been treated for psychosis for some time without their symptoms improving.

Structural neuroimaging

Structural neuroimaging involves using scans to look at the structure of the brain. Two common types of scan are used – MRI or CT scanning. MRI uses magnetic fields and radio waves to produce high-quality images, while CT scanning uses a series of X-rays. These methods are used to examine the brain to check whether a person's psychotic symptoms have been caused by a physical illness, such as a tumour or stroke.

What does this mean for me?

Using structural neuroimaging to examine all people who have had a first episode of psychosis was not shown to improve diagnosis. Therefore it was not shown to represent value for money. This means that for the time being structural neuroimaging should not be used routinely on the NHS. However, if your symptoms suggest that a physical illness may be causing your psychosis, structural neuroimaging could still be used if your doctor thinks it would be helpful.

More information

The organisations below can provide more information and support for people with psychosis. Please note that NICE is not responsible for the quality or accuracy of any information or advice provided by these organisations.

- Mind, 0845 766 0163,
www.mind.org.uk
- Rethink, 0845 456 0455,
www.rethink.org

NHS Direct online (www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk) may be a good starting point for finding out more. Your local Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) may also be able to give you further advice and support.

About NICE

NICE produces guidance (advice) for the NHS about preventing, diagnosing and treating different medical conditions. The guidance is written by independent experts including healthcare professionals and people representing patients and carers. They consider all the research on the disease or treatment, talk to people affected by it, and consider the costs involved. Staff working in the NHS are expected to follow this guidance.

To find out more about NICE, its work and how it reaches decisions, see www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance

This leaflet and other versions of the guidance aimed at healthcare professionals are available at www.nice.org.uk/TA136

You can order printed copies of this leaflet from NICE publications (phone 0845 003 7783 or email publications@nice.org.uk and quote reference N1474).

We encourage NHS and voluntary sector organisations to use text from this leaflet in their own information about psychosis.