

PE1723/CC: Essential tremor treatment in Scotland

Rhoda Grant MSP submission, 9 September 2024

I would like to first apologise for my inability to attend committee to speak to this petition as previously planned. Recent developments in the agenda for Rural Affairs Committee which I sit on, and which runs concurrently with the Committee, meaning I can no longer attend.

This petition represents the campaign that has been working continuously for the national uptake of MR guided focussed ultrasound (MRgFUS) as an effective treatment for those with Essential Tremor for almost a decade.

I would urge the Committee to keep the petition open.

I believe it would be helpful to get the National Services Division (NSD) and representation from NHS Tayside executive board in to committee to ensure there is progress on this petition. Having MRgFUS treatment available in Scotland would positively impact NHS waiting times, represent value for public money, and expedite the most effective and preferred treatment for essential tremor patients.

I will set out the justification for this briefly:

Cost is the reason given preventing the NSD from taking up the treatment nationally. The NSD wrote to the Committee citing financial pressures as why they would not progress an application from NHS Tayside earlier this year.

However, cost and delivery are partly why I believe the treatment should be taken on nationally, and why the committee should keep this petition open to push for a national service on the NHS.

Currently, patients in Scotland who need treatment are referred to England, to hospitals in Liverpool or London. The NHS must cover significant costs to do this and adopting the treatment in Scotland would be more cost-effective. The issue of budgetary pressures and a lack of funding would align with ensuring public monies are spent as efficiently as possible; the longer the NSD does not take on this treatment as a national service, the more public money is wasted.

Continuing to refer patients out of country for treatment represents significant cost to the public purse and organisations such as Audit Scotland would be relevant in reviewing sustained practice of this.

It can be more cost-effective to have treatment in Scotland and even more importantly, the uptake of the treatment here would lead to fewer hospital stays, reduced need for ongoing medical care, and less long-term symptom relief which in turn would reduce the overall healthcare burden for managing essential tremor patients.

MRgFUS is the preferred treatment for essential tremor. It is less invasive than alternatives such as DBS due to its non-invasive nature and minimal recovery time.

The patient's quality of life improves substantially, and the treatment aligns with NHS guidelines toward less invasive medical interventions.

The benefit to patients exceeds the public benefit. Receiving treatment closer to home, close to loved ones is much less stressful. Patients also face financial barriers to accepting treatment in England as they often need loved ones close but this is not funded.

Essential tremor is one of the most common movement disorders in Scotland, affecting about 1 in 25 people over the age of 40. Given the aging population, this number is expected to grow. There is a medical and financial justification to ensure we make progress of this petition.

We know of the lifechanging benefits of this treatment and we know that implementing MRgFUS as a national service in Scotland would offer an advanced, effective, and patient-preferred treatment option for essential tremor. It aligns with Scotland's healthcare goals of improving accessibility, equity, and cost-effectiveness, so I would urge the committee to write to both the NSD and NHS Tayside to push for a resolution.