

Freedom of Information Request

Ref: 25-354

23 June 2025

By Email

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for your request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The Trust's response is as follows:

- We can confirm that we do hold the information you are requesting

I am writing to submit a Freedom of Information (FOI) request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. I seek information regarding the provision and commissioning of Vagus Nerve Stimulation (VNS) therapy within your NHS Trust.

1. Does your Trust currently provide VNS therapy for patients with epilepsy? - Yes, for Paediatrics

2. Is there a formal contract or service agreement in place for the provision of VNS therapy? - No, it is not stated in the service specification from NHSE.

If yes, please provide details on:

o The type of contract or agreement.

o Duration and renewal terms.

o Any key performance indicators (KPIs) or service-level agreements (SLAs) attached to the contract.

Not applicable

3. Does your Trust have a value-based agreement for any neuromodulation services? If so, does this specifically include VNS?

We do not hold this information.

4. How is VNS surgery currently funded, commissioned, and delivered at your Trust?

Delivered as part of our elective activity.

- **Is it covered under a block contract, an elective tariff (e.g. via the NHS England Specialised Services Devices Programme), or another funding mechanism?**

Device costs are passed through devices supplied through the NHSE specialised service devices programme.

• **If no specific contract or tariff applies, how is VNS surgery currently commissioned?**

Device costs are passed through devices supplied through the NHSE specialised service devices programme.

• **Does your Trust hold a block contract for Neurology and Neurosurgery services, and if so, does this specifically include epilepsy-related services such as VNS?** - No

• **Are there any existing outsourcing arrangements or public/private partnerships in place for the delivery of VNS surgery or wider epilepsy services?** – No

• **Are there any plans to develop or commission VNS services in 2025/26 as part of the delegated responsibilities to the ICS/ICB for adult patients?**

We do not hold this information.

5. What OPCS codes does your Trust use for VNS primary implantation and battery replacement of VNS devices? - Implantation of VNS A33.1 + Z04.4

6. Are Y codes used for VNS battery replacement surgery? Is the OPCS code YO32 (Renewal of prosthesis in organ NOC) Revision/change of Battery A33.2 +Y03.2. Yes, Y03.2 is used for renewals.

7. Has the Y code (YO32 Renewal of prosthesis in organ NOC) been applied consistently for all VNS battery replacement cases in 2023 and 2024? A definitive answer would require a specific audit; however, it is likely that the coding has been applied consistently. Incorporating additional information using Y codes, when supported by documentation, aligns with standard practice.

8. Who is the Business Manager for Neurosurgery, Neurology

Under Section 40(2) of the Freedom of Information Act, relating to a breach of Principle 1 of the Data Protection Act we are required to judge as to whether the disclosure of the information would be fair and reasonable to our employees. Guidance issued by the Information Commissioner states that this exemption will commonly apply to "lists and directories of staff" and we do not believe that disclosing names and contact details to a third party would be fair or reasonable; therefore we are withholding this information at this time.

and the Operations Director at your Trust?

Currently vacant.

9. Who is responsible for liaising with the ICB for commissioning VNS and other neuromodulation services for epilepsy? - Business Manager for Neurosciences.

10. Who is the relevant commissioner at the ICB responsible for Neurology and Neurosurgery services?

We do not hold this information. Please contact NHS Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board (BNSSG ICB) at bnssg.foi@nhs.net for further information.

11. Who is the clinical lead for Neurosurgery and Neurology at your trust. And is there a VNS lead in Neurosurgery and Neurology?

Under Section 40(2) of the Freedom of Information Act, relating to a breach of Principle 1 of the Data Protection Act we are required to judge as to whether the disclosure of the information would be fair and reasonable to our employees. Guidance issued by the Information Commissioner states that this exemption will commonly apply to "lists and directories of staff" and we do not believe that disclosing names and contact details to a third party would be fair or reasonable; therefore we are withholding this information at this time.

12. Does your Trust have a strategy for increasing the number of procedures, such as VNS, performed as day-case surgery? - No

13. Who is leading surgical efficiency plans, including any initiatives to shift more epilepsy-related procedures to a day-case setting? - This is led within Neurosciences department

14. Does your Trust have a strategy for increasing the number of procedures, such as VNS, performed as day-case surgery? – No

15. Who is leading surgical efficiency plans, including any initiatives to shift more epilepsy-related procedures to a day-case setting? - This is led within Neurosciences department

16. What are the current waiting times for patients referred for a VNS implantation and battery replacement? - Average wait for VNS insertion is approximately 11 weeks. Battery replacements are treated as required

17. Does your Trust provide VNS services for patients outside its own ICS footprint? If so, how are these services reimbursed? - Yes, patients are treated throughout the South West, the service is commissioned by NHSE.

18. What is the standard referral pathway for a patient requiring VNS therapy? - Patients are referred to the Children's Epilepsy Surgical Service via their local DGH, assessed and discussed at MDT and then will proceed to VNS if clinically appropriate

19. How many VNS implants did the trust implant in 2023 and 2024? - For both primary implants and replacement implants. Per calendar year; 2023 - 52, 2024 - 64

20. Delegation of Specialised Commissioning Responsibilities

a) When will specialised commissioning for adult neurology and neurosurgical services, including VNS, be fully delegated to ICBs? – Not known

b) Will paediatric specialised commissioning services also be delegated to ICSs/ICBs? - Not known

21. Future Commissioning Responsibilities

a) Will the Department of Health & Social Care assume any commissioning responsibilities for epilepsy and other specialised services for adults and children including VNS surgery? – We do not hold this information.

This concludes our response. We trust that you find this helpful, but please do not hesitate to contact us directly if we can be of any further assistance.

If, after that, you are dissatisfied with the handling of your request, you have the right to ask for an internal review. Internal review requests should be submitted within two months of the date of receipt of the response to your original letter and should be addressed to:

Data Protection Officer
University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust
Trust Headquarters
Marlborough Street
Bristol
BS1 3NU

Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF

Publication

Please note that this letter and the information included/attached will be published on our website as part of the Trust's Freedom of Information Publication Log. This is because information disclosed in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act is disclosed to the public, not just to the individual making the request. We will remove any personal information (such as your name, email and so on) from any information we make public to protect your personal information.

To view the Freedom of Information Act in full please click [here](#).

Yours sincerely

**Freedom of Information Team
University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust**

