# Transanal irrigation

This briefing reviews the use of transanal irrigation to ensure proper pathways are in place before prescribing and wastage is reduced through appropriate prescribing. It is a supporting bulletin for the PROP-List.

Transanal irrigation (also referred to as anal irrigation, rectal irrigation or retrograde irrigation) is used to **prevent uncontrolled bowel movements (faecal incontinence) or to relieve and prevent constipation** due to bowel dysfunction. Bowel dysfunction can have neurogenic and non-neurogenic causes.[1]

## Key recommendations

- Be aware that transanal irrigation is a specialist management option for bowel dysfunction and should only be considered as part of a locally commissioned supportive bowel care programme.[1]
  - A clinical evaluation by an appropriate specialist is necessary before starting treatment.
  - It is not recommended for initiation by GPs in primary care, without specialist management.
- Commissioners should consider integrating transanal irrigation into care pathways that have been agreed across a locality and by the multidisciplinary team. Agreed pathways should:
  - Ensure careful patient selection.
  - Incorporate training and ongoing support for the patients from a specialist healthcare professional.
  - Clearly state who is responsible for long-term support, monitoring and prescribing.[2]
- Minimise waste by ensuring the correct type and quantity of consumables are ordered. This should take into account the frequency of irrigation and the number of uses appropriate for the product.
- Ensure that patients are made aware of the risk of bowel perforation (a rare complication), how to recognise the symptoms and actions to be taken.[3]
- Consider using an appropriate, validated scoring system at baseline and at reviews to help identify if there has been a demonstrable improvement in symptoms.[2]
- Consider transanal irrigation only in those whose bowel dysfunction cannot be managed with more conservative options e.g. medication, changes to diet and physiotherapy.[1]
- If GP practices are responsible for ongoing prescribing:
  - Have a robust communication process in place to ensure that the GP receives information from the specialist service about which products the person will need and the quantities required.
  - Do not add items to the repeat prescribing systems until a consistent routine of irrigation has been established (often on alternate days). Consider only adding items that are required on a monthly basis as repeats.
- Monitor prescribing data and consider practice-level audits to identify issues such as initiation that is not in accordance with local guidance and overordering.

## Supporting evidence

A prospective, multi-centre randomised controlled trial (RCT) compared transanal irrigation with conservative bowel management.[4] Eighty-seven adults with spinal cord injury with neurogenic bowel dysfunction were enrolled for the ten week trial period, using the Peristeen transanal irrigation system. Statistically significant improvements in bowel-related patient-reported outcomes were reported for transanal irrigation compared with conservative management.[1,4]

Some further small RCTs have been published, but other evidence is largely derived from observational case series.

## Savings available

In England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Isle of Man and Scotland in excess of £41.9 million is spent annually on transanal irrigation systems (NHSBSA England and Wales (July to September 2024), and Public Health Scotland (July to September 2024)).

**A 20% reduction in prescribing (by reducing wastage and inappropriate prescribing) would produce savings in the order of £8.3 million annually. This equates to £11,196 per 100,000 patients.**

## References

1. NICE. Peristeen Plus transanal irrigation system for managing bowel dysfunction. Medical technologies guidance [MTG36]. Published 23 February 2018, last updated 06 June 2022. https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/mtg36
2. NICE. Adoption support resource – insights from the NHS. Implementation support for MTG36. Published 28 January 2019, last updated 6 June 2022. https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/mtg36/resources
3. Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) Medical Device Alert. Peristeen® Anal Irrigation System manufactured by Coloplast Limited. MDA/2011/002, issued 06/01/11 (now archived). https://mhra-gov.filecamp.com/s/PM57AEFqqeHdMifO/d
4. Christensen P, Bazzocchi G, Coggrave M, et al. A Randomized, Controlled Trial of Transanal Irrigation Versus Conservative Bowel Management in Spinal Cord–Injured Patients. Gastroenterology 2006;131:738–747. https://doi.org/10.1053/j.gastro.2006.06.004

| Additional PrescQIPP resources, including implementation tools and data: | https://www.prescqipp.info/our-resources/bulletins/bulletin-355-transanal-irrigation/ |
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