

Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy in NHS TT

Background

MBCT has been recommended in NICE guidelines for people with chronic and recurrent depression since 2004. In recent NICE guidelines (2022) MBCT is also recommended for people with less severe depression.

Since 2018 Health Education England (HEE) and then NHS England (NHSE) have supported a training programme for MBCT teachers in NHS TT, aiming to make MBCT available to people accessing TT services. This training runs annually and is provided free to TT staff.

Benefits of MBCT in IAPT services

MBCT is a cost-effective group-based intervention that can be delivered in an online and/or in-person format. Evidence supports its use in TT for people with recurring depression, both as an approach for preventing future episodes, as well as reducing depressive symptoms and supporting patients into recovery. Recent research suggests it is also helpful for people who still have symptoms of depression after a course of CBT (Barnhofer et al, 2025).

NHS England are committed to supporting increased availability of this intervention through delivery in NHS TT services. Over the past 7 years, over 200 NHS TT therapists have been trained through the NHSE funded training and are now running groups in NHS TT services across the country.

How you can support your staff to bring MBCT to patients.

Achieving the successful integration of MBCT in NHS TT requires consideration and planning in order to ensure effective and sustainable delivery into services. Managers can support staff during training and establishment of clinical groups in the following ways:

- Recognise the significant personal commitment demonstrated by staff undergoing MBCT training and teaching. MBCT teachers are required to maintain a daily mindfulness practice.
- MBCT sessions are two hours per week over eight weeks. In addition to teaching, time is needed to prepare sessions, meet with co-teachers to plan and debrief from sessions, meet supervision requirements, patient screening and writing notes etc. Recognising time required to carry out these commitments supports staff in delivering this intervention optimally.
- Recognising the value of MBCT in NHS TT services and how this can transform patients distress enables staff to feel supported in undertaking this challenging but rewarding work.

In summary, MBCT is an invaluable addition to mental health services offered by NHS TT. National guidelines recommend its use and patients routinely describe the potentially life-changing benefits arising from attendance on MBCT courses. As a complex intervention MBCT requires staff and managerial recognition and commitment in order to ensure that this is available to all patients who may benefit from this effective, evidence-based treatment.

