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THE ELECTROENCEPHALOGRAM: MISUSED AND MISUNDERSTOOD?

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Electroencephalograms (EEG's) are a popular non-invasive test with a minimal side effect profile. However, previous studies have found that more than half of the requests for EEG's are inappropriate. There is a two-fold importance for ensuring EEG's are used effectively. Firstly, despite being relatively inexpensive compared

with other tests, an inappropriate investigation is a waste of time and resources. Secondly, there are limitations to the capabilities of the EEG. An inappropriate request can lead to a false positive result and incorrect diagnosis with life changing consequences. An audit conducted in St George's Hospital, London in 2003–2004 found that over a quarter of EEG requests were “inappropriate” and rarely altered management.

We audited 35 EEG requests made at the Manchester Royal Infirmary from 01/06/2013–31/07/2013. We used case notes and discharge letters to help assess whether EEG's were requested appropriately, whether they altered management and whether they were performed within the national target of four weeks. We found 71.4% of EEG requests were inappropriate, similar to the SGH audit. As there has been little improvement in 7 years, further discussion and clearer guidelines on EEG requesting are needed.