

The role of the radiography workforce in stroke management



The Society & College of Radiographers

Patients with acute brain attack require rapid access to high quality and appropriate imaging in order to diagnose the type of stroke. Radiographers are a vital part of the specialist stroke care team and within the UK there are many clinical imaging departments operating systems which allow for rapid access scanning of patients – 24 hours a day, seven days per week.

Diagnostic tests need to be fast and accurate and radiographers undertaking this work not only have highly specialist skills in imaging modalities, but are experienced in the care and techniques required for scanning acutely ill patients who require urgent assessment during a critical period of the care pathway.

Radiographers may also have the advanced skills to review and report the images obtained to help facilitate rapid access to thrombolytic therapy by the stroke care team, or neurosurgical review within the timescale required. Postgraduate courses in interpretation of head CT images have existed for some years and this is considered normal practice for radiographers in many imaging departments.

Many radiographers are also able to undertake more complex diagnostic tests for stroke, including CT perfusion imaging, carotid Doppler ultrasound, MR scanning – specifically for transient ischaemic attack (TIA) including Diffusion Weighted Imaging (DWI), MR perfusion, Magnetic Resonance Angiography (MRA) and Contrast Enhanced MRA (CEMRA).

Patients who suffer deficit following a stroke experience ongoing medical problems and will be frequent visitors to imaging departments, requiring sensitive support from the radiography workforce, particularly if they have cognitive impairment.

Patients who are either unsuitable for thrombolysis therapy, or who do not show a positive response, need other types of imaging such as plain chest imaging, either at the bedside, or in the department. They may also have associated pathology which has predisposed them to acute brain attack, such as peripheral vascular disease or a history of mobility problems, requiring imaging investigation.

The early assessment of dysphagia (swallowing difficulties) is vital to prevent long term problems and radiographers work alongside speech and language therapists to lead this service.

Members of the radiography workforce are also well placed to influence the choices made by their patients with regard to health and well-being and they undertake a range of health improvement activities for the benefit of patients and other user groups.

Summary

The radiography workforce is a vital part of the specialist stroke care team, providing rapid access to a range of high quality and appropriate imaging during a critical period of the care pathway. Radiographers have developed their clinical practice in a variety of complex procedures, improving outcomes for patients who have suffered brain attack.

There are considerable gains to be achieved from developing a safe, fast and effective imaging and treatment regime for patients with TIA and stroke and an educated, trained and competent radiography workforce is well placed to deliver the service.

The radiography workforce delivers diagnostic imaging and radiotherapy services in a range of health and social care settings across the UK. Radiographers are pivotal to delivering fast and reliable diagnoses of disease, as well as curative and palliative treatment and care for patients with cancer. A large majority of patients will be referred for imaging during their treatment and radiographers are key to the delivery of successful clinical outcomes.

The Society and College of Radiographers (SCoR) is a professional body and trade union. With more than 90% of the radiography workforce in membership, it represents the entire profession. It shapes the healthcare agenda and leads opinion on a wide range of professional issues, setting standards and developing policies that are adopted and acclaimed by governments and health professionals worldwide.

The SCoR pioneers new ways of working and ensures that its members work in a safe and fair environment. Its activities are designed to ensure that patients receive the best possible care.

The SCoR believes that:

- Every patient must have the right diagnostic examination, at the right time, undertaken by the most appropriate person, using the right equipment to the best possible standard and with timely results to inform the outcome.
- Every cancer patient must be able to be in control of decisions about their care and have access to the most effective treatment, delivered at the right time and by the most appropriate person.

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