

Additional MRI equipment is needed to deliver a world-class imaging service



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Nearly **40%** of MRI systems over seven years old do not have a replacement plan in place.



Demand for MRI is outstripping capacity in terms of equipment and workforce.

The Clinical Imaging Board (CIB) commissioned a survey to assess the current state of the UK NHS magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) equipment base, its usage and organisations' plans for replacement.

The results demonstrate that 29% of clinical systems are ten or more years old and do not have state-of-the-art capability, with only 44% aged five years or under. This limits some patients' access to high-quality imaging and compares unfavourably with other European countries – a situation which is unlikely to improve given the current economic challenges being experienced by the NHS

Only half of the responding organisations stated that they had a replacement plan in place for MRI systems. There were no replacement plans for nearly 40% of systems that are already seven or more years old.

Comparing with data from the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the UK has one of the lowest numbers of MRI systems per million population (6.1) yet performs 56.3 scans per 1,000 population, just slightly under the OECD average, demonstrating a very high level of utilisation. Furthermore, while respondents predicted a 13% growth in future activity, many reported being unable to undertake state-of-the-art MRI investigations due either to equipment and/or capacity limitations. These issues are further exacerbated by the shortage of radiographers and radiologists.

While many NHS radiology services have future MRI replacement plans in place, it is of great concern that a significant number do not. This requires action by NHS radiology services and all stakeholders.

Recommendations

All NHS radiology departments need a future equipment plan, looking forward at least five years. Professional bodies working together should produce a template or framework to assist development for equipment plans.

It is imperative that the NHS invest in additional, and replacement, MRI equipment together with the required staff to deliver world-class diagnostic services to patients.