



North Bristol
NHS Trust



**University Hospitals
Bristol and Weston**
NHS Foundation Trust

5th June 2020

Dear Colleague

Re: Diagnostic Imaging Services in Covid-19

The Radiology Departments at all three Hospitals (Southmead, BRI and Weston General) have been one of the services hit very hard during the COVID crisis, with significant numbers of staff shielded and infection control measures reducing flow through scanners.

The departments have been only been able to work at less than 50% capacity, prioritising inpatients, cancer outpatient work and other urgent scans. This is a national picture.

Additional CT and MRI scanning capacity is being accessed via the Independent Sector at The Spire and Nuffield Hospitals. It is further hoped that the CT scanner assigned to the Nightingale Hospital will be able to provide some additional CT capacity. Further avenues of independent sector support also continue to be explored.

Nevertheless, we are likely to remain well below our previous activity levels across all modalities for some considerable time, which has major implications for routine diagnostic imaging work.

The key messages for primary care are:

GP direct access plain film demand is beginning to increase and going forward this service will have to be by appointment only. We are unable to offer a walk-in service due to social distancing requirements. More details on how to access plain imaging will be circulated separately by each Trust.

The higher proportion of urgent demand associated with CT requests from Primary Care will mean very little capacity for non-urgent CT scans in the upcoming months including brain imaging for cognitive impairment without focal neurology.

We will continue to prioritise:

Cancer staging, 2WW suspected cancer and Cancer follow-ups on active treatment

Urgent non cancer adult and paediatric examinations, including the most urgent outpatient cardiac imaging

Urgent or time sensitive interventional radiology procedures

Time sensitive routine examinations where there is a short window of opportunity for treatment e.g. baby hip Ultrasound .

Obstetric ultrasound scans will also continue as normal.

Escalation of routine imaging by GPs/Clinicians for clinical deterioration of patients.

We currently have several thousand outstanding imaging requests from Primary care across all modalities. Referrals were vetted by Consultant Radiologists and prioritised as urgent or routine. The urgent patients should all have been imaged or offered appointments and it is the routine patients, or patients who have chosen to delay their appointment who remain on the waiting lists

Wherever possible, we have liaised with Clinical colleagues to ensure that our prioritisation is aligned with their clinical priorities for the management of each patient.

Given the scarcity of the resource, where the clinical information provided does not appear to warrant use of our limited urgent imaging capacity, we apologise for returning the requests to referrers to seek your advice on whether these examinations are truly needed under current service limitations. We have advised you that returned requests will be cancelled and re-referral required if the investigation is still needed, unless clinical urgency for the scan has escalated.

What can you do?

Please provide as much information as possible on request forms to allow us to assess relative urgencies and correctly prioritise patients.

We may be unaware of patient comorbidities and vulnerabilities that increase their risks during Covid- 19, and your assessment of these risks in relation to the benefits of attending a hospital for imaging investigations is invaluable. Please consider if imaging is appropriate at all in vulnerable patients whilst Covid-19 risks persist.

Please inform us if any routine scans can be cancelled whilst imaging service restrictions persist. We are recording details of every examination cancelled on account of Covid-19 for Clinical Governance clarity.

Please inform us of any routine scans that are still required but can be postponed until Covid-19 service restrictions are lifted (please note this could be several months).

We are finding that some patients are unwilling to attend for imaging procedures when we contact them. Many are asking for appointments to be deferred until later in the year. To improve the efficiency and productivity of the service, we would ask that when making a referral you are sure that your patient will attend for an imaging procedure if we call them for an appointment. If patients are offered an appointment and will not attend, we will cancel the request and ask them to see their referrer for re referral if still needed, once they are willing to travel to the hospital for the scan. We need to do this to keep our waiting lists active and maximise use of precious resources. .

Some of the sites we have recruited to provide additional scanning capacity are unable to accommodate patients with mobility limitations or requiring patient transfer. Please indicate this on the request form so that we can accommodate the patients at an appropriate site.

Radiology Queries and Advice

These are very testing times for our teams, and we acknowledge how difficult it is for GPs and patients.

As always, we are happy to discuss any patients that you are concerned about, and will endeavour to accommodate any patients who are in need of urgent diagnostic imaging.

NBT

Please call the Imaging Secretary of the Day on 0117 414 9110 (for urgent enquiries) or otherwise email the GP specific inbox: nbn-tr.radiologygpqueries@nhs.net if you have a specific query regarding any of your patients that requires discussion with a Radiologist.

UH Bristol

If there is any clinical concern about any of your patients please contact the Radiology Admin Team on:

ubh-tr.radiologyadminbri@nhs.net (Adults)

ubh-tr.RadiologyAdminBRHC@nhs.net (Paediatrics)

Weston General

For queries please call 01934 647 203

Wnt-tr.radiologysecretaries@nhs.net

Future plans

Whilst none of us can currently predict how long the Covid-19 pandemic will continue to affect our normal way of life and NHS services, we can assure you that the Radiology teams at North Bristol and University Bristol and Weston will continue to work tirelessly to provide whatever imaging services we can in a safe and effective manner for our patients. We are confident that we will be able to continue to increase imaging capacity over the coming months in order to restore additional routine imaging services. We intend to work within the BNSSG area to optimise clinical pathways and make best use of our imaging capacity to support you in the care of your patients.

Many thanks for your help and understanding during these difficult circumstances.

Kind regards

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