

FOI 1585

06/04/2023

## **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 – INFORMATION REQUEST**

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### **Question 1. What is an emergency / urgent MRI?**

Answer:- Often the distinction is not clear but generally an emergency MRI represents a time critical investigation, which should be performed as soon as possible on the next available appointment slot. In the majority of cases emergency MRI is performed for the clinical reason of query spinal cord compression, cauda equine.

Urgent MRI examinations represent non-emergency requests that the clinical need means these should be performed faster than routine or planned examinations. The timeframe for performing these urgent examinations varies greatly depending on whether these are inpatient or outpatient examinations, the complexity of the examination and are also subject to fluctuations in service demand and availability.

### **Question 2. Why do none of the hospitals within the SHSCT supply emergency / urgent MRI's? (24 hour service?)**

Answer:- The SHSCT MRI scanners (based in Craigavon Hospital) do provide an emergency MRI service during normal departmental opening hours, (Monday – Friday 8am-8pm, Saturday and Sunday 9am-5pm, currently no bank holiday provision).

At present the only 24/7 MRI service in Northern Ireland is based in the Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast, and patients are referred to this service on an individual basis when required. This represents the current strategy for emergency MRI out of hours provision in Northern Ireland as per the Department of Health.

### **Question 3. How are the consultant base within the SHSCT made aware that there is no emergency / urgent MRI service within the SHSCT?**

Answer:- There are both local and regional emergency MRI services available. Consultants within SHSCT are aware of the operational hours of the MRI scanners and which workflow to follow.

### **Question 4. Is there a policy or underlying document that details how emergency / urgent MRI's should operate? (operating times, criteria for a referral from consultant, staffing)**

Answer:- The MRI local rules provides the following guidance on staffing:

#### **3.12 Staffing levels**

To operate a normal service/workload, there should be a minimum of two MR operators per MR scanner. It is recognised that if only one MR operator is present, along with a suitable MR authorised person, workload will be reduced. There should be no lone working under any circumstances.

The commonest request for an emergency MRI examinations is for suspected cauda equine syndrome and we have developed a Standard Operating procedure to help expedite these cases. There is also a policy of what to do during operational hours and outside of these times.

**Question 5. Is there an underlying document or policy dealing with suspected spinal compression which details the steps required in terms of emergency MRI / treatment?**

Answer:- It is understood that any emergency MRI requires direct communication with the MRI department to expedite the scan as soon as possible, as our electronic request system currently has no method of distinguishing emergency requests from urgent requests, this communication does not have to be made by a Consultant.

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