

Cross sectional imaging for malignant melanoma in the South West Region: How does this compare to National Guidelines and published evidence?

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Background

The UK Guidelines for the Management of Cutaneous Melanoma give guidance regarding imaging of patients with melanoma, but it was perceived that there might be variation in practice within the region. To better understand current practice in the South West region and to evaluate the availability of imaging facilities, the South West Public Health Observatory's (SWPHO) Skin Cancer Tumour Panel carried out a regional survey. The aim of this survey was to improve understanding of current practice, and to further inform the development of evidence-based guidelines.

Methods

A questionnaire was designed and piloted in one of the Acute Trusts. The questionnaire was then distributed in October 2005 to the Lead Clinician for Skin Cancer at each of the 23 Acute Trusts covered by the SWPHO. Data were then collated and analysed using SNAP and Excel.

Results

Seventeen completed questionnaires were received from 20 Trusts within the region. The responses indicated that imaging generally tended to be available both promptly and locally with the exception of PET or PET/CT, which was reported as available supra-regionally by only 9 and 10 respondents respectively. Imaging was most frequently recommended by the respondents for investigation of symptoms, was less frequently recommended for staging and least frequently for follow-up. This was consistent across all modalities of imaging. Respondents did however report use of imaging for the follow-up of selected patients, but responses indicated that generally imaging was not used for routine follow-up of all patients. The majority of respondents to the survey (10/17) felt that there was a need for better guidance.

Discussion

None of the respondents to the survey recommended routine follow-up imaging for all patients, and responses indicated that cross-sectional imaging was largely used for the follow-up of selected patients particularly if symptomatic. The UK Guidelines for the Management of Cutaneous Melanoma do not make any specific recommendations regarding the use of imaging for follow-up other than to note that "Regular radiological imaging is currently not a necessity...". In addition the Royal College of Radiologists recommendations do not give any guidance for follow up of stage III/IV disease other than to say imaging may be used to monitor treatment response or in trials. We propose further discussion of this issue as the majority of our respondents indicated that more robust imaging recommendations would be helpful.