

# Doctors demand prostate scan for thousands of men

Chris Smyth Health Editor

MRI scans to test for prostate cancer will improve treatment and spare thousands of men needless surgery, a study suggests.

Combining MRI with ultrasound markedly improved the detection of tumours and helped doctors to pick out the most aggressive cancers, British researchers found.

They hope the method could permit men with less threatening cancers to avoid gruelling surgery or radiotherapy, while creating "tumour maps" to allow more accurate treatment.

Every year 40,000 men are told they have prostate cancer on the basis of a biopsy guided by ultrasound. However the method, which involves sticking up to a dozen needles into the prostate to look for cancer, does not always find a tumour and even when it does doctors cannot be sure they have found the most aggressive part.

"This is a kind of random, systematic sampling — therefore the accuracy of this test is limited," said Saad Fyyaz, one of the doctors in the West Midlands who carried out the study. His team combined the results of ultrasound with MRI, which Dr Fyyaz said "has resulted in far better diagnostic yield".

In a study that involved more than 80 patients the doctors compared the results of the combined method with standard biopsies. They found that 25 per cent of the samples identified through the MRI combination method contained prostate cancer, compared with 16 per cent from the ultrasound-only method.

Four patients given the all-clear after

a conventional biopsy were told they had cancer needing immediate treatment after MRI, while six were told that their cancer was more dangerous than originally thought, Dr Fyyaz told the president's meeting of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh.

Aniruddha Chakravarti, consultant urological surgeon at Russells Hall Hospital, in Dudley, who led the study, said that MRI was "the future" of biopsies because it needed only one needle, cutting down on bleeding and complications, as well as improving care.

Some patients whose biopsies are clear are advised to have treatment because doctors fear that standard biopsy might have missed something. Mr Chakravarti said: "We can show there isn't any high-grade tumour hiding anywhere."

Fewer than half of NHS hospitals offer MRI before biopsies, even though a much larger study is expected to report soon that a slightly different scan method improves care by revealing the size, shape and location of the tumour.

Professor Mark Emberton, from University College Hospital, in London, who is leading that trial, said last year that if he needed a biopsy he would demand an MRI first. He said he had treated patients who had undergone several traditional biopsies that missed cancer before it was picked up by MRI, and said that current policy was "equivalent to randomly putting a needle into the breast in the hope over expectation that you would find breast cancer".

Iain Frame, director of research at Prostate Cancer UK, said that hospitals should start preparing to offer MRI if Professor Emberton's trial is successful.