

Dynamic contrast-enhanced CT compared with positron emission tomography CT to characterise solitary pulmonary nodules: the SPUtNik diagnostic accuracy study and economic modelling

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†In memoriam

Declared competing interests of authors: Andrew Clegg, Valerio Benedetto and James E Hill are part-funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Applied Research Collaboration North West Coast. Fiona J Gilbert is a NIHR Senior Investigator. She was a member of the Health Technology Assessment Efficacy and Mechanisms Evaluation Board (2014–19). Andrew Cook reports grants from the NIHR Health Technology Assessment programme during the conduct of the study. Fergus V Gleeson reports other from Optellum Ltd (Oxford, UK) outside the submitted work. Robert C Rintoul reports salary support from Cambridge Biomedical Research Centre and Cancer Research UK Cambridge Centre, during the conduct of the study. Robert C Rintoul also reports personal fees from AstraZeneca and Roche for work on their Advisory Board outside the submitted work. Nagmi R Qureshi is part-funded by the Cambridge Biomedical Research Centre.

Published March 2022

DOI: 10.3310/WCEI8321

Plain English summary

SPUtNik study and economic modelling

Health Technology Assessment 2022; Vol. 26: No. 17

DOI: 10.3310/WCEI8321

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Plain English summary

A nodule found on a lung scan can cause concern as it may be a sign of cancer. Finding lung cancer nodules when they are small (i.e. < 3 cm) is very important. Most nodules are not cancerous. Computerised tomography (cross-sectional images created from multiple X-rays) and positron emission tomography-computerised tomography (a technique that uses a radioactive tracer combined with computerised tomography) are used to see whether or not a nodule is cancerous; although they perform well, improvements are required.

This study compared dynamic contrast-enhanced computerised tomography with positron emission tomography-computerised tomography scans to find out which test is best. Dynamic contrast-enhanced computerised tomography involves injection of a special dye into the bloodstream, followed by repeated scans of the nodule over several minutes. We assessed the costs to the NHS of undertaking the different scans, relative to their benefits, to judge which option was the best value for money.

We recruited 380 patients from 16 hospitals across England and Scotland, of whom 312 had both dynamic contrast-enhanced computerised tomography and positron emission tomography-computerised tomography scans. We found that current positron emission tomography-computerised tomography is more accurate, providing a correct diagnosis in 76% of cases, than the new dynamic contrast-enhanced computerised tomography, which provides a correct diagnosis in 70% of cases. Although dynamic contrast-enhanced computerised tomography cannot replace positron emission tomography-computerised tomography, it may represent good-value use of NHS resources, especially if it is performed before positron emission tomography-computerised tomography and they are used in combination.

Although more research is required, it may be possible in the future to perform dynamic contrast-enhanced computerised tomography at the same time as positron emission tomography-computerised tomography in patients with suspected lung cancer or if a lung nodule is found on a lung screening programme at the time of the computerised tomography examination. This may reduce the need for some people to have positron emission tomography-computerised tomography.

Health Technology Assessment

ISSN 1366-5278 (Print)

ISSN 2046-4924 (Online)

Impact factor: 4.014

Health Technology Assessment is indexed in MEDLINE, CINAHL, EMBASE, the Cochrane Library and Clarivate Analytics Science Citation Index.

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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HTA programme as project number 09/22/117. The contractual start date was in August 2012. The draft report began editorial review in December 2019 and was accepted for publication in September 2020. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HTA editors and publisher have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the draft document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health and Social Care. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health and Social Care.

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