

About a third of [NHS](#) trusts in England are using “technically obsolete” imaging equipment that could be putting patients’ health at risk, while existing shortages of doctors who are qualified to diagnose and treat disease and injuries using medical imaging techniques could triple by 2030.

According to data obtained through freedom of information requests by Channel 4’s Dispatches programme, 27.1% of trusts in NHS England have at least one computerised tomography (CT) scanner that is 10 years old or more, while 34.5% have at least one magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanner in the same category. These are used to diagnose various conditions including cancer, stroke and heart disease, detect damage to bones and internal organs, or guide further treatment.

An [NHS England report](#) published last year recommended that all imaging equipment aged 10 years or older be replaced. Software upgrades may not be possible on older equipment, limiting its use, while older CT scanners may require higher radiation doses to deliver the same image, it said.

Among the trusts identified by the Dispatches audit are King’s College hospital NHS Foundation Trust in London, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust, Royal Cornwall hospitals NHS trust, and Chelsea and Westminster hospital NHS Foundation Trust. Half of London North West university healthcare NHS trust’s MRIs are 16 years old, while one MRI scanner at Great Ormond Street Hospital Trust is 21 years old.

It also found that X-ray equipment dating back to the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s is being used in the NHS in England. The programme, Clapped Out: Is the NHS Broken? will air on Channel 4 on Monday at 8pm.

Dr Julian Elford, a consultant radiologist and medical director at the Royal College of Radiologists (RCR), said: “CT and MRI machines start to become technically obsolete at 10 years. Older kit breaks down frequently, is slower, and produces poorer quality images, so upgrading is critical.

“We don’t just need upgraded scanners, though; we need significantly more scanners in the first place. The [NHS England report] called for doubling the number of scanners – we firmly support that call, and recommend a government-funded programme for equipment replacement on an appropriate cycle so that radiologists can diagnose and treat their patients safely.

“We also need significant investment in workforce. The NHS is currently short of nearly 2,000 radiologists. Only by looking at the problem holistically can we bring about real improvement to patient outcomes and cut waiting times.”

A [separate report](#) published by the RCR on Wednesday predicted that the NHS could waste £420m by 2030 if it continues with expensive outsourcing and overseas recruitment to plug the UK’s shortage of radiologists and clinical oncologists. One in 10 radiologist jobs in the UK are currently unfilled. The report projected that the shortages of radiologists in the UK could hit 6,000 by 2030, while the current shortage of 200 clinical oncologists could treble to 600.

Coroners have also raised concerns over the national and local shortage of radiology staff, and insufficient CT and MRI scans. Dispatches looked through five years' worth of prevention of future deaths reports for those where a lack of radiology kit or staff was mentioned. It found 48 reports between 2016 and 2021 that mentioned a lack of scans and/or radiology staff in relation to the death of a patient.

A spokesperson for the Department of [Health](#) and Social Care said: "We have backed the NHS with £525m to replace diagnostics equipment over the last two years and have recently set up 40 new one-stop-shop diagnosis centres in the community to deliver 2.8m more scans for patients across the country.

"There are over 9% more radiology doctors compared to the same period in 2019 and we have provided £52m to further invest in the cancer and diagnostics workforce over the next two years."

Source: [NHS England hospitals having to rely on 'obsolete' imaging equipment](#)