

Fewer Screenings, but More Serious Cases in Italian Community Hospitals



Italy was one of the first European countries to face the Covid-19 pandemic. The first lockdown came into effect on 9 March 2020, to flatten the curve of contagion. These measures had a huge impact on all levels of medical practice. A study was conducted to examine how the workload of radiological examinations changed during the pandemic and how the outcomes of examinations were affected by lockdown measures. Dr Vincenzo Vingiani from the Hospital Sorrento, Italy, was involved in the multicentric study.

Four community hospitals in four different Italian regions were involved, with total annual visits between ranging 2000 and 45 000 for x-rays, sonography, CT scans or an MRI (in 1 hospital only). The samples were limited to the period 23 March - 12 April 2020; and compared to data from the same period in 2019. The data included: demographic of patient; clinical indication; and image findings collected only performed in the emergency department.

Two radiologists from each hospital rated the examinations independently either as positive or negative, based on a blind review of the images and came to consensus via discussions. The image findings were categorized into: MSK, chest, neuro and abdomen. A list of the main pathology and corresponding description of findings were given to all centres.

In 2020, only 745 patients were screened – for the specific sample period – compared to 2623 patients in 2019. The median age for patients with trauma was higher during the pandemic, at 57, compared to 47 years in 2019. There was no difference in the median age for patients with non-trauma. A relative increase of positive findings indicate that more serious conditions had developed. Further data showed an overall decrease of patients requesting emergency radiology imaging examination during the pandemic. This could be ascribed to patients' fear of access to hospitals. In short, this means that radiology departments should plan for decreased volume, but be ready for higher frequency of positive cases during future pandemics.

Source: <https://connect.mysr.org/course/developments-in-emergency-imaging/#1>

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