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Imaging developments in sports medicine



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Advancement of technologies continues to improve diagnosis

The official doctor for the Slovenian athletics team speaks to HealthManagement.org about how emerging technologies have made a positive impact on sports medicine and resulted in more precise diagnostics.

How crucial is the role of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) in sports medicine?

In my opinion, I believe that the use of MRI imaging has been revolutionary for sports medicine as it has resulted in more precise diagnostics. The obvious advantages of being able to deliver more precise diagnostics is, of course, faster rehabilitation, and not just in sports medicine. An accurate diagnosis makes the rehabilitation simpler and quicker, because of the accurate display of the problem. As a specialist in sports medicine, I believe that magnetic resonance imaging presents a whole new revolution in sports medicine.

What do you think is the most important development in imaging relevant to the practice of sports medicine in the last 20 years?

The progress and development in this field in the last 20 years has been enormous. Imaging diagnostics has resulted in faster rehabilitation, which is indeed ground-breaking and of vast importance in sports medicine.

How has the development of ultrasound contributed to the practice of sports medicine?

I would not like to minimise the immense contribution that ultrasound has made to the field of sports medicine, however I believe that MRI has been even more significant and important. In my opinion, portable ultrasound is very significant in sports medicine. It has become part of the basic equipment during training sessions and preparations for competitions since it enables fast, direct and on the spot diagnostics. It facilitates the diagnosis especially when muscles and tendons are affected.

How MRI findings contribute to Return to Play criteria?

MRI findings significantly contribute to return to play criteria. I strongly advise athletes against returning to play without a prior final MRI check. Until the radiologist gives the green light that the injury has been completely rehabilitated, I cannot give my consent for the athlete's return-to-

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play.

Are new imaging techniques on the horizon?

I believe that the advancement of technologies and the overall ever-progressing development will enable the techniques to become even more accurate and precise. I expect a significant advancement of the MRI technique in the near future.

How can they help the sports physician?

The techniques can be of great help because the accuracy of the diagnosis progresses according to the advancement of the technique which consequently means improved diagnostics and subsequently a faster return of the athlete at competitive level.

Moving the diagnostic scanning process from the radiology department to the outpatient clinic has no doubt raised concerns about safety and clinical governance. What are your thoughts on this, do you think this is something to be concerned about going forward?

In Slovenia this is not the practice. The MRI, CT and X-rays are being performed exclusively in radiology departments in hospitals and not in outpatient clinics. This is regulated by the legislation. Outpatient clinics in Slovenia only work with ultrasounds. I personally agree with this and believe that moving the diagnostic scanning process from the radiology departments is most definitely a reason for concern.

Is there a risk of the development of a customer- driven approach to management in which the athlete leads decisions on when and what to image?

In my opinion this is certainly something to look out for and a customer-driven approach is not the way to go. There is definitely a safety issue involved. Only professionally-trained experts with necessary training, knowledge and expertise should be able to make the decisions regarding when and what to image.

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