



The Royal College of Radiologists

PRESS RELEASE

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ROYAL COLLEGE OF RADIOLOGISTS RESPONDS TO BMJ ARTICLE, “WAITING FOR RADIOTHERAPY”

The Royal College of Radiologists is aware of an article published in the *British Medical Journal*, highlighting the shortfall in both equipment and staffing in many UK oncology departments, which is leading to unacceptable waiting times for radiotherapy treatment for some patients. The article was written by Prof. David Dodwell and Dr Adrian Crellin, oncologists at Cookridge Hospital, Leeds

Dr Michael Williams, Registrar of the College's Faculty of Clinical Oncology, said "this article draws attention to the fact that there is enormous scope for improvement in the provision of radiotherapy services in the UK. Currently shortages of staff are the cause of unacceptable waiting times for curative radiotherapy treatment for the majority of UK patients. A survey by this College of waiting times, published in 2003, found that around 70% of patients waited longer than a month to start treatment. In the two years since this survey, both equipment and staffing levels have increased. Our initial analysis of a repeat survey in Autumn 2005 shows that the UK national waiting time situation has improved but only slightly: over half of patients still wait longer than one month. This is totally unacceptable to all the professionals involved and threatens the chance of cure for some patients".

"This issue of waiting times for treatment, highlighted repeatedly over the last seven years by the College, was independently identified as a major problem in the NHS by the National Audit Office in 2004. In June 2004, a multidisciplinary standing National Radiotherapy Advisory Group was established by the Department of Health to address this issue. As a consequence both a national workforce and an equipment plan are nearing completion. The national shortage of radiographers was also addressed in 2001 by doubling the numbers of training places: these additional staff are now completing their three year basic training and are starting to become available to treating departments.

"Continued and sustained investment in all the elements that go up to make the NHS radiotherapy services is required if the UK is to have a modern service able to deliver the best treatment to patients in a timely way. The College is working with the Department of Health's National Cancer Director, Professor Mike Richards, on strategies for this investment.

We hope to see a national UK long-term radiotherapy plan published in 2006."

Notes to Editors

1. For further information, please contact the College's Communications Officer, Dan Garbutt, on 020 7299 1138, or dan_garbutt@rcr.ac.uk
2. The Royal College of Radiologists (RCR) has approximately 6,900 members and Fellows worldwide representing the disciplines of clinical oncology and clinical radiology. All members and Fellows of the College are registered medical or dental practitioners.
3. The role of the College is to advance the science and practice of clinical radiology and clinical oncology, further public education and promote study and research through setting professional standards of practice.