

HSIB investigation into failures in communication or follow-up of unexpected significant radiological findings

A statement from the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges

July 2019

The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges (the Academy) welcomes the Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch's (HSIB) investigation into the failures in communication or follow-up of unexpected significant radiological findings.

The investigation has highlighted key reasons failures occur. It points to similar problems that were raised by the National Patient Safety Agency's Safer Practice Notice in 2007. This includes: variation in practice in how unexpected significant radiological findings are communicated to clinicians, variation in how findings are acknowledged and if actions indicated by the findings have been taken.

While such events are rare, this remains a long-standing and persistent problem. Given the sheer volume of imaging that occurs, it is imperative that the processes are reliable and that action in response to significant findings can be assured to prevent patient harm.

In response to the recommendations in the report the Academy,

1. Endorses the principle that clinicians must act on alerted radiological findings
2. Supports the recommendation for a monitored acknowledgement system to be in place in all local organisations. This may be through a single centralised system or specialty specific processes. The choice of process is for local decision depending on the available infrastructure
3. Will support the Royal College of Radiologists in co-ordinating across specialties to define what is reported as 'unexpected and significant', critical or urgent and what conditions should automatically trigger an alert
4. Believes that the CQC should review the adequacy of reporting, alerting and acknowledgement arrangements as part of its inspections of NHS trusts
5. Supports the recommendation to develop a patient notification process for unexpected and significant results. The notification should not cause undue alarm to the patient, should provide information on any action they need to take. It should also give clear contact information
6. Believes that the principle of ensuring that there is clear communication and follow up of results should be extended to all investigations.