
Patients with heart disease missed by NHS tests, says expert

Hundreds of cases of serious heart disease are being missed every year by the NHS, which is putting thousands more through needless tests which waste around £40 million a year, a leading expert has warned.

By Rebecca Smith, Medical Editor
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The current tests used to identify people at risk of a major heart attack - because their blood vessels are dangerously narrowed - are inadequate, costly and even risky, Prof Avijit Lahiri, of the private Wellington Hospital in London said.

Patients with chest pain are referred for initial tests and then sent for an angiogram which involves injecting dye into the veins and then taking a series of x-rays to find narrowing.

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However around 40 per cent of the angiograms show nothing meaning the patient was put through the £1,000 procedure for nothing.

On top of this, an estimated one in 10 of those with chest pain perform well on the initial tests and are discharged but are in fact suffering from arteries which are up to 90 per cent blocked, Prof Lahiri claimed.

He is now carrying out a trial of 1,000 patients who will be randomly assigned to receive either the normal NHS care or be sent to the Wellington to receive CT scans.

He said: "The use of imaging is abysmal in this country in comparison to the rest of the world.

"It is not uncommon for the NHS to turn patients away and them drop dead of a heart attack. It is the whole system. We are dinosaurs.

"I believe using CT scans can reduce the number of unnecessary angiograms – which are invasive enough tests – and make a more accurate diagnosis.

"We have got the radiation dose down to the minimum possible with our CT and at £400 a go, it is also cheaper than an angiogram."