



# A small scale qualitative study to investigate the interaction between psychiatric patients and diagnostic radiographers in one Irish hospital<sup>☆</sup>

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## KEYWORDS

Radiographers;  
Psychiatric patients

**Abstract** *Background:* A substantial number of patients with psychiatric illnesses present to the Imaging Department across the Irish Republic each year. Patients who have a psychiatric illness may present difficulties for the radiographer during a radiographic examination. These difficulties may include communication difficulties, and an increased prevalence to become violent due to their illness.

*Aims:* To investigate if radiographers feel confident interacting with psychiatric patients. To ascertain if radiographers need more training in this area of patient interaction.

*Method:* A qualitative approach was used drawing upon six radiographers working in a regional hospital with a psychiatric unit attached. The radiographers were interviewed individually and the results were thematically analysed.

*Results:* The results indicated that the level of the radiographers own confidence in relation to interacting with psychiatric patients was influenced by the number of years since qualification. The majority of radiographers in the study displayed a poor knowledge of psychiatric conditions and how they affect patients.

*Conclusion:* Based upon this small study, the results suggest that newly qualified radiographers do not feel confident in their own abilities when interacting with psychiatric patients and would welcome and benefit from specific training with regards to strategies to deal with psychiatric patients. The radiographers reported that particular areas which may be improved upon are more information on psychiatric illnesses, manifestations of different types of psychiatric illness and the subsequent effect on patients. A larger study encompassing the whole of the Republic of Ireland would be valuable as a precursor to a European comparative study in order to investigate this phenomenon at a deeper level. Additionally it is recommended that further research is conducted within a wider European context on student radiographers and lecturers teaching on undergraduate radiography courses to ascertain if this topic is addressed at undergraduate level.

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<sup>☆</sup> Declaration of Interest. This is unfunded research and there is no declaration of interest of which we are aware.

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## Introduction

Doherty et al. [1] states that one in every eight people in the Republic of Ireland suffer from a mental illness and a recent public campaign stated that one in four adults will suffer from a mental illness at some point in their life [2]. The authors continue that there were nearly 6000 admissions in 2008 to psychiatric units in Ireland, a rate of over 490 per 100,000 [2]. This study refers to inpatients [2], although it is recognized that a variety of psychiatric patients are treated as outpatients. Previous research [3] claims it is inevitable that a substantial number of patients suffering from psychiatric illnesses will present to imaging departments throughout the country each year and it is imperative that they receive an excellent standard of examination despite any difficulties they have with regards co-operation etc. This research explored the difficulties which arise as psychiatric patients are being X-rayed, and radiographers confidence in themselves when imaging psychiatric patients. It questions if radiographers are sufficiently trained when interacting with psychiatric patients and if not what areas may be addressed so that knowledge in this area improves?

## Methodology

The method chosen to research this topic was one of a qualitative nature in order to explore ideas, thoughts and words as opposed to numbers [4]. This approach was thought by the researchers to be suitable to test the hypotheses, an important part of research in Diagnostic Imaging [5].

Qualitative research which the authors deemed as appropriate is sensitive to the concerns priorities and perspective of the participants [6].

In this study a semi-structured qualitative interview was the method chosen to conduct this particular research because of the advantages highlighted [7,8].

## Ethics

Ethical approval was granted for this study, ethical waiver no: URECSMMS-020809. Ethical principals were adhered to during the course of this research as identified by previous authors [5].

Information about the study, its aims and objectives and information about the interviews and how they would be conducted were included in a letter sent to the chosen hospital. Interviewees also received a letter containing information about the study and how the interviews would be conducted should they wish to participate. Radiographers were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and participants could withdraw at any time.

It was also made clear to the interviewees who participated in this research that the identity of the interviewees would remain anonymous, via making sure that the authors only had access to the tapes and by naming the interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 so all identifying features were removed [8]. The tapes were also destroyed after they were transcribed onto paper.

## Selection of interviewees

The proposed clinical site was a regional hospital with a psychiatric unit attached. This helped to ensure that the radiographers interviewed would have a sufficient amount of interaction with psychiatric patients. Initially a pilot study was conducted on one radiographer, and changes made to the interview schedule for the main study.

The interviewees consisted of one pilot interviewee and six interviewees for the main study, all were selected from a regional hospital with an attached psychiatric unit. The interviewees were selected from the particular hospital department via stratified sampling. This was due to the time constraints of the researchers and the imaging department.

A letter was composed and sent to the radiographic services manager containing information relating to the purpose of the study and requesting permission to conduct both the pilot study and main study in the hospital.

In the main study six radiographers of various grades were interviewed. This sample was used to ascertain whether or not there was any significance relating to the number of years qualified and the answers given. The authors then proceeded to construct a list of sample questions and another letter detailing the nature and purpose of the study and this was sent out to the Radiography Services Manager (RSM) to be distributed among the radiographers interested in taking part in the study. This was done to provide any radiographers who were interested in taking part in the study to make an informed decision on whether or not to participate. A further phone call from the Radiographic Services Manager was then received informing the author that fourteen radiographers comprising of both junior and senior members of staff had agreed to take part in the study. The names were given to the authors and six radiographers were chosen using stratified sampling by the authors and individual interviews were conducted by one of the authors. Six radiographers were chosen out of a total population of fourteen to reflect a variety of grades and experience. It was not possible to include all fourteen radiographers as this was unfunded research and the researchers needed to cause minimum disruption to the imaging department.

## Recording the interviews

All interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and the tapes used were destroyed by the author after the transcription process. This is very important with regards to transcribing the interviews accurately for analysis [8]. The interviews were transcribed after completion to also ensure accurate transcription, as notes made later have higher occurrences of omitting information [7]. The use of a Dictaphone to record the interviews was the preferred method for this study because it is a lot faster than taking hand written notes therefore minimising the time required for each interview and in turn reducing any disruption to the interview [9].

## Analysis of data

The qualitative data obtained from the interviews was thematically analysed which allowed for the extraction of

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