A day in the life of a Diagnostic Radiographer

The majority of patients seen in hospitals will need to be referred to a Radiology department at some point during their treatment, which will mean coming into contact with a Diagnostic Radiographer.

Using different techniques and technologies, radiographers produce high quality images of areas of the body to diagnose injury or disease. Radiographers will take the images, and very often also report the findings, so that the correct treatment can be given.

Radiographers are trained in a variety of areas, and use a range of procedures to diagnose a patient:

- **X-rays** – to look through tissue to examine bones, cavities and foreign objects;
- **Fluoroscopy** – to produce moving images of the digestive system to see how it functioning;
- **CT Scans** – which provides cross-sectional views of the body in different slices, to show the internal make up of the patient;
- **MRI Scans** – builds a 2-D or 3-D map of different tissue types within the body;
- **Nuclear medicine** – which uses radioactive tracers to examine how the body and organs function, for example the kidneys or heart. Certain radioisotopes can also be administered to treat particular cancers, e.g. thyroid cancer;
- **Angiography** – to investigate blood vessels.

The main area of work for a radiographer is X-rays, which accounts for 70%-80% of all imaging examinations.

In the main Radiology department, radiographers will X-ray patients who have been referred as inpatients whilst on the ward or referred as Outpatients by their GP. Imaging support is also provided at X-ray units in the A and E and Out Patients Departments. In certain circumstances, a radiographer will take mobile X-ray machines onto wards for patients who are too ill to be taken to the X-ray Department.

Also, radiographers can be asked to take X-rays during surgical procedures to assist the surgeon. For example, if a metal plate is being inserted to fix a broken bone, the X-rays will confirm that it is appropriately positioned. X-rays may also be taken after surgery to check that it has been a success.

Diagnostic radiographers provide imaging cover on a 24/7 basis and most will have a regular commitment to working outside routine office hours.

Rhian Harries has worked as a Diagnostic Radiographer at Morriston Hospital for the past two and half years.
Rhian said: "I love my job. I enjoy the patient contact and also the variety of being able to work in different areas of the hospital. It often means that we are able to see the patient throughout the different times of their journey, as they may need several X-rays taken at different stages of the treatment.

“For example, when I have a shift at A and E, a trauma case may come in and need an X-ray of their leg. If it is broken and they need surgery, I may be working a mobile shift whilst they are having their procedure, and be called to theatre. If they have a plaster cast put on, I could be working in the Outpatients’ unit during their appointment at Fracture Clinic, which may need X-rays to be taken. Its lovely when I am able to watch as a patient recovers.

“Every day is different, and we are constantly learning on the job. You often have to think outside of the box and use your initiative, as you can't always scan patients in the traditional way. Sometimes they are injured or uncomfortable lying in the traditional position used to X-ray the particular part of the body, and you have to think how best to move them in order to take the image accurately.

“I work with a really good team. Everyone is very friendly and polite, and if you are ever stuck, they are more than happy to help.”

To become a Diagnostic Radiographer staff need to have completed a course of study and training recognised by the Health Professions Council (HPC). Usually they complete an undergraduate degree in diagnostic radiography, or a postgraduate diploma or masters if they already have a relevant science degree.

With a few years of experience behind them, there are opportunities for Diagnostic Radiographers to train in more specialised areas of imaging.

Some radiographers may extend their post graduate studies to allow them to become ultrasonographers, providing ultrasound examinations for patients. The most commonly recognised is obstetric scanning of pregnant women, but it can also be used for investigations of the abdomen, muscles and Vascular systems.

Radiographers can also train to carry out certain forms of Gastro Intestinal Imaging, which are tests to look at how parts of the digestive system are functioning. This includes barium studies of the oesophagus, stomach and colon, which involve a solution being put into a patient’s body which shows up darker on X-Rays, especially in areas where there is a problem. Several images are taken in quick succession to watch as the solution moves into the affected area to see if there are any issues.