

# Wait Times to Access Routine MRI Scans

The use of electronic referral for diagnostic imaging (DI) requests supports faster access to routine MRI scans and a higher proportion of patients seen within the Ministry's target time of 28 days

## Average wait time and percentage of patients to access non-urgent MRI scans by method of referral

Ocean eReferral



**22%**

Average % of patients seen within target time

Less Wait Time

Average wait time  
**153 days**

Health Quality Ontario  
Fax and eReferral

**11%**

Average % of patients seen within target time

Average wait time  
**164 days**

## Key Information

### Ocean data

- 233 MRI referrals to Grand River Hospital (GRH) and 155 to Cambridge Memorial Hospital (CMH) were scheduled for appointments using Ocean eReferral in July 2020
- 18% of appointments at GRH and 25% of appointments at CMH were within the target wait time (28 days) with an average wait time of 149 days and 153, respectively

### HQO data

- 2% of patients at GRH and 19% of patients at CMH were seen within the target wait time (28 days) with an average wait time of 160 and 164 days, respectively

With eReferral, my DI appointment was made soon after request, which is good.

With eReferral, DI appointment is faster than I ever expected.

With eReferral, actually things moved faster than usual

KW area patients,  
Patient Satisfaction Survey

- Wait time data of non-urgent MRI referrals were reviewed and compared by method of referral for two hospitals in Waterloo-Wellington - **Grand River Hospital (GRH) and Cambridge Memorial Hospital (CMH)**
- July 2020 wait time data was extracted for eReferrals from the Ocean database, and for all methods of referrals (eReferral and fax) from Health Quality Ontario (HQO)<sup>1</sup>

## Background

With the wide availability and direct access to diagnostic technology, MRI has become a more common way to obtain information, especially for clinics with high workloads.<sup>2</sup> In Ontario, the rate of ordering MRI scans has increased significantly over the past 10 years. According to the Auditor General Ontario (2020) office, non-urgent MRI scans have increased by 8% between 2013/14 and 2017/18.<sup>3</sup>

Although MRI is considered a sensitive diagnostic tool that can identify many clinical soft tissue lesions, MRI's low specificity can sometimes inflate false-positive findings and yield only slightly useful results.<sup>4</sup>

Evidence shows that not all ordered MRIs are clinically necessary.<sup>5</sup> Yet, they maximize patients' expectations of clinical intervention and entice them towards potentially unnecessary procedures.<sup>6</sup>

In Ontario, with this increase in use, there is a reported upsurge in wait time to receive semi-urgent and non-urgent MRI appointments. Approximately 65% of patients experienced a longer than expected wait time to receive an imaging scan, exceeding the Ministry's target of a 28 day wait time for non-urgent patients.<sup>3</sup>

The Ocean eReferral Network adopted the University Hospital Network's (UHN)<sup>7</sup> evidence-based diagnostic imaging guidelines, integrating the clinical decision support wording within its electronic forms. These best practice guidelines support clinicians in making appropriate MRI referral decisions and decrease the ordering of unnecessary tests. Ocean eReferral also includes access to a healthmap that allows clinicians to view real-time wait time information by service and location. These efforts work together resulting in decreased wait times for patients to access necessary care.

## Acknowledgements

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