

Routine heart scans could save thousands of lives

University of Edinburgh research published recently in the New England Journal of Medicine shows that heart scans on patients experiencing chest pains could save thousands of lives in the UK.

If the life-saving scans are used then heart disease can be spotted earlier and treatment given to prevent heart attacks.

The researchers involved in the SCOT-HEART study want scans like this to be used as routine. They tracked more than 4000 patients referred to a hospital with angina symptoms. Half of those were given a scan in addition to other tests and the number of heart attacks dropped by 40%.

Even though additional procedures increased during the first year that had levelled out by year five. The study shows that using scans in routine care would not of itself lead to more tests or more heart surgery.

Patients who are at risk of a heart attack are frequently diagnosed with a test called an angiogram. This involves inserting tubes into the body and heart to check the flow of blood and identify any obstructions that could pose a heart attack risk.

CTA scans enable doctors to look at the blood vessels from the outside the body, without the need to insert tubes into the heart. The scans are cheaper, quicker and safer than angiograms.

The study had previously found that around a quarter of patients had their diagnoses reclassified after receiving the scan, prompting new treatments in many cases.

This is the first study to look at the impact of the scans on long-term survival rates.



Professor David Newby

Lead researcher Professor David Newby, of the BHF Centre for Cardiovascular Science at the University of Edinburgh, said: "This relatively simple heart scan ensures that patients get the right treatment. This is the first time that CT guided management has been shown to improve patient outcomes with a major reduction in the future risk of heart attacks. This has

major implications for how we now investigate and manage patients with suspected heart disease.”



Photo courtesy of the
British Heart Foundation

Jeremy Pearson, Associate Medical Director at the British Heart Foundation, said: “This scan saves lives. Patients who receive CT-angiography in hospital are better off than those who don’t. They’re more likely to receive lifesaving drugs and treatments like statins in the earlier stages of disease, which leads to fewer heart attacks in the long run.

“In the past we’ve been unsure whether this scan translates to a real-life patient benefit. But these results make it clear – it’s a cheap, reliable, non-invasive way to save lives and the wide-spread use of the scan should be adopted across the UK.”