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Private referrers are 'stuck in their ways'

By Leslie Berry

Independent practitioners may not be offering patients the best referral choices, as most are reluctant to research external medical units, a new study claims.

The survey of regular medical referrers, including surgical specialists, claimed that 80% have no interest in finding out the technical specifications or services offered by the units where they send patients.

Even fewer practitioners sought information online, with only 10% of those clinicians who refer for medical scans having ever visited their scanning unit's website.

Despite listing the quality of technology as one of the most important qualities when choosing where to send patients, only a third of these referrers knew which scanner was used at their MRI centre.

The findings were revealed by the Queen Square Imaging Centre in London. Clinicians and medical secretaries were asked about



Queen Square Imaging Centre in London, which conducted the survey of referrers

how and why their patients were referred.

Patients were found to have little say in where they are referred to. They were consulted in just 50% of referral decisions by choosing a unit that suited their location, technical specifications or personal needs.

Queen Square Imaging Centre director Miss Jodee Cooper said: 'If practitioners know very little about where they are referring, then they may not be providing their patients with the best options.'

'There is huge variation in the services available at private medical units and this information is

normally very easy to access online, so doctors should be doing more to ensure that their patients are offered the best choices.'

Consultant orthopaedic and sports physician Dr Keith Bush, who has referred to two of his London MRI providers for over 26 years, said: 'I am very happy with the centres I currently refer to, so a medical unit would have to offer something unique in order for me to change my referral process.'

'Having said this, if clinicians rely entirely on routine, then they risk missing out on improved technology or expert staff elsewhere.'