

From the Ombudsman Robert Behrens CBE

Mr William Wragg MP  
Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee



**Sent via email only**

7 July 2021

Dear William,

I am writing to share a new PHSO report on how the NHS can learn from complaints about imaging, which I have laid in Parliament today. The report, *Unlocking Solutions in Imaging: working together to learn from failings in the NHS*, includes the learning from complaints that raise significant concerns about patient safety. It will be published on our website at midnight on Thursday 8 July and you can access an embargoed copy [here](#).

We have produced this report to support and encourage NHS staff, leaders, and policy-makers to deliver safer care for patients.

The report draws on PHSO's unique evidence base to highlight four themes:

- **failure to follow national guidelines on reporting unexpected imaging findings**
- **failure to act on important unexpected findings**
- **delays in reporting imaging findings**
- **failure to learn from past mistakes.**

These failings led to missed opportunities for earlier diagnoses of cancer and, in the most serious case, an avoidable death. The cases show that these issues are not isolated to radiologists, radiographers, or imaging services, but relate to the whole system. These failings can only be learnt from and addressed through collaboration across clinical specialties, looking at the whole patient journey through imaging.

The investigations found that failings often resulted from an absence of adequate policies, processes, and digital reporting capabilities. Crucially, our report highlights the central importance of a culture of continuous learning and improvement. This is essential to ensure the same mistakes don't happen again.

We are acutely aware of the current pressures on the NHS and the need to ensure the NHS recovers well from the pandemic. There are currently **5 million** people waiting for elective care in the NHS. Alongside other diagnostic services, imaging will play an essential role in the care of many of these patients. The scale of the challenge facing the NHS is not a reason to avoid or postpone making improvements to the quality and safety of care, however. Rather, it underlines the urgent need for Government and the NHS to make the much-needed improvements to issues we have identified, so NHS services can recover well from the challenges created by the pandemic, and so these challenges are not compounded by unsafe care.

We have made a number of recommendations to support the NHS to deliver the improvements needed. This includes a recommendation that the Department for Health and Social Care and



NHS England writes to the Committee in six months to provide an update on progress.

We ask the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee to support and challenge the system to ensure it prioritises the improvements set out in this report.

Yours sincerely,

Rob Behrens

Rob Behrens CBE

**Ombudsman and Chair**

Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman