

Developing a Multi-Consultant Practitioner lead service within an NHS Ultrasound department

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Objective...

To highlight a novel approach to developing an NHS, Multi-Consultant practitioner lead ultrasound service in an increasingly volatile profession where sonographers are being lost to the private sector, or leaving the profession completely.

Introduction...

The 2000's saw the emergence of the non – medical consultant practitioner (CP) in response to the economic pressures faced by the NHS compounded by lack of suitably trained radiologists and the changing demographic of the population.[1]

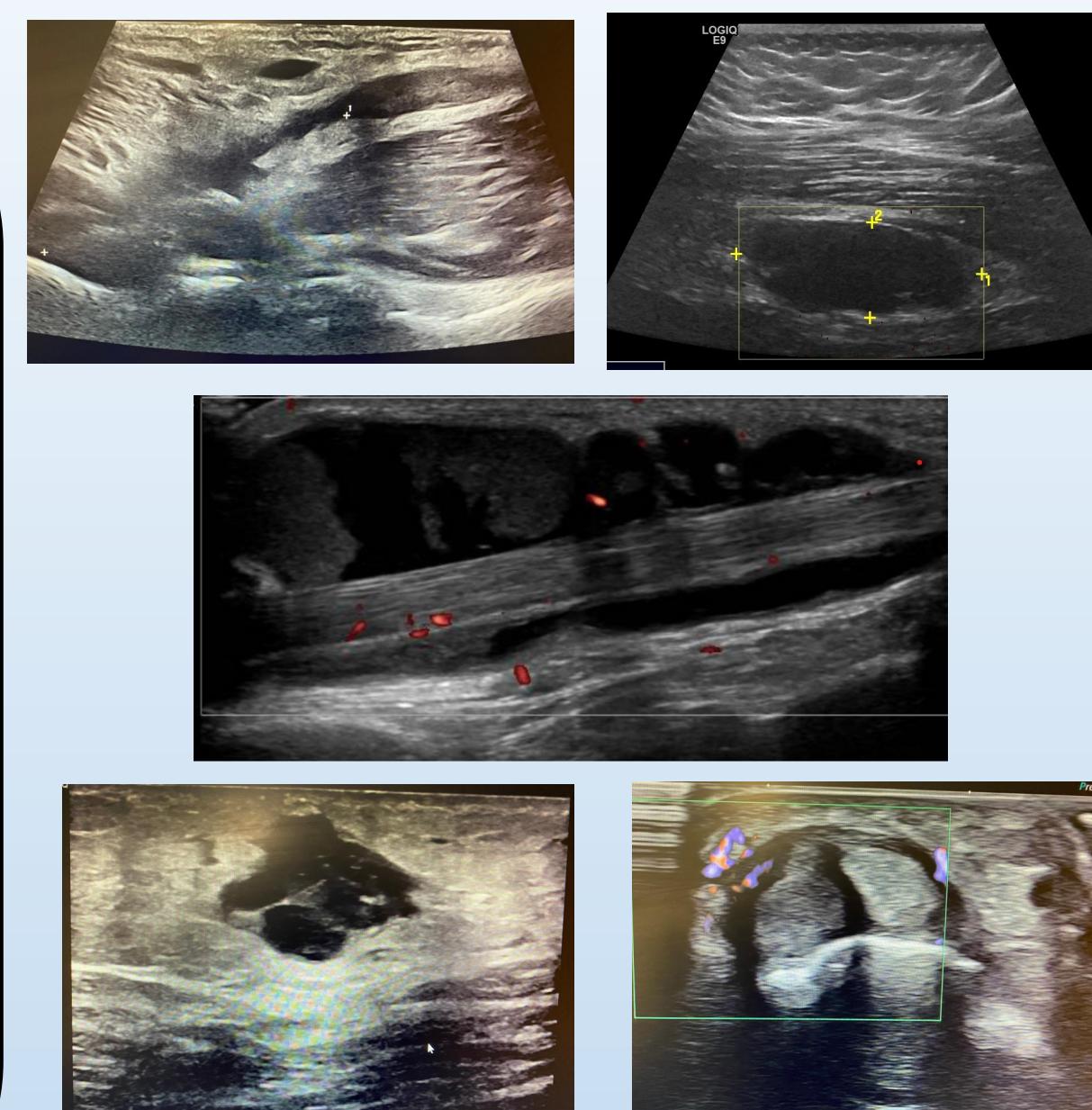
Some trusts have actively developed and supported the CP role whilst in other trusts there has been resistance. Reasons cited in studies include;

Lack of engagement by radiologists to offer sufficient training and support [2]

Protectionism of title by other medics

Lack of understanding by stakeholders as to the skill levels, roles and responsibilities of the CP

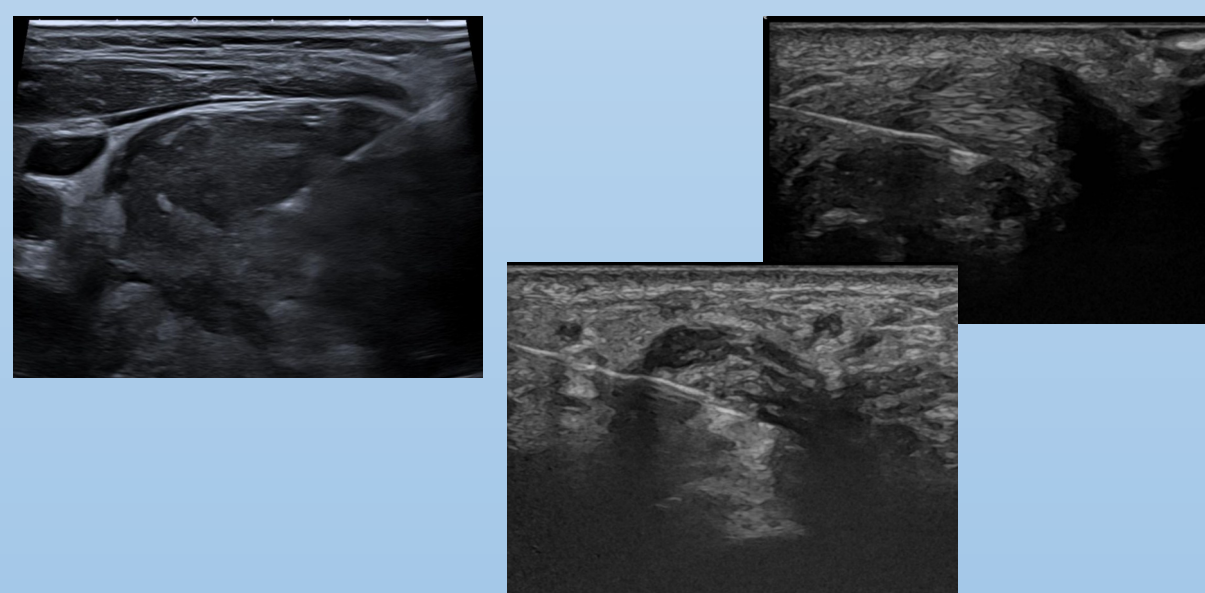
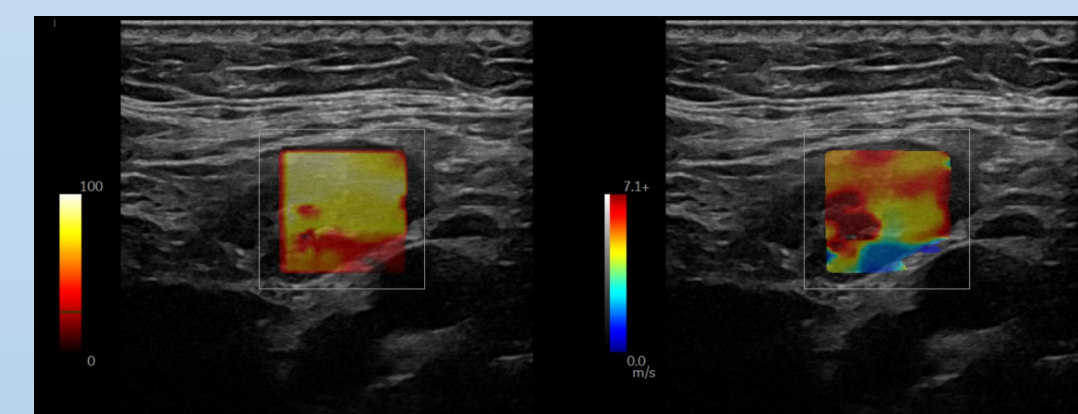
Even with clear career progression frameworks developed by NHS England [3] there is wide variation in what is considered consultant practice from one trust to another [4] and thus some managers are unwilling to recognise the title and remunerate accordingly. Where the role has been adopted CP are seen as a valuable adjunct supporting radiologists, providing highly specialised skills and knowledge, streamlining services to allow better patient access to imaging/intervention and thus timely treatment.



Background...

Two advanced practitioners (AP) educated to MSc level, with existing subspecialised skill sets were employed as trainee consultant practitioner sonographers. One AP already trained in head and neck (H&N), one in Musculoskeletal (MSK), both with interventional experience. The advanced practitioner in H&N regularly performing FNA/Core biopsies of the H&N as well as lymph nodes of the axilla and groin. The advanced practitioner in MSK regularly undertaking soft tissue and joint injection, aspiration and nerve blocks with steroid/local anaesthetic as well as shoulder and hip arthrograms.

In previous roles both advanced practitioners had varying degrees of leadership/management responsibility and amongst other things, undertook external educational roles within higher education institutions, as well as publishing work in books, producing educational material for BMUS undertaking Journal peer review, setting up sonographer lead one stop clinics to streamline patient services and working toward PhD. Thus, both AP, to varying degrees, work across the four pillars of advanced practice as set out by then HEE in their previous roles.



Training...

Senior consultant sonographer supervising both trainee consultants in H&N, MSK and other interventional techniques, as well as advanced diagnostic imaging.

Each trainee consultant also responsible for the training of the other in their subspeciality area.

Formal educational training undertaken by each trainee consultant sonographer on CASE accredited courses of H&N and MSK.

Future...

Shared skill set of all consultant sonographers to include:

Interventional examinations (FNAC, Ascites Tap, Pleural Tap, Core Biopsy, Liver Biopsy, MSK Aspirations and steroid injections, nerve blocks, arthrograms).

Outcomes...

- Trainee consultant sonographers benefit from teaching their subspeciality to each other, overseen and also taught by the Senior consultant to allow streamlining of advancement to CP and ensures training of specialist skills does not fall solely on one individual.
- Interventional skills already acquired during development as an advanced practitioner can be utilised in new subspeciality.
- Multiskilled practitioners that can cover multiple subspecialist areas.
- No single point of failure where services rely on one individual, allowing for robust service provision.
- Management and leadership responsibilities can be shared between CP which free's up time for attendance at MDT and to undertake research, teaching and learning.
- Raises the profile of the department: attractive for the recruitment and retention of staff.
- Students get a rich and supportive learning environment.
- Widens opportunities for existing staff to develop advanced skills in subspecialist areas as there is more than one CP to offer training and mentorship.

References

- 1 SCoR (2022) Consultant Radiographers. Guidance for the support of new and established roles .
- 2 Dalili D, Carne A, MacKay J, O'Connor P, Silver D, Robinson P, et al.(2021) Musculoskeletal ultrasound imaging standards in the UK: British Society of Skeletal Radiologists (BSSR) position statement. Br J Radiol ; 94: 20210198.
3. NHS England (2025) 2nd edition. Multi- Professional framework for advanced practice.
4. BMUS (2021) NHS sonographers scope of practice: Survey by the British Medical Ultrasound Society.