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<p>Access to radiotherapy varies dramatically between countries across Europe, according to a study led by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Austria.</p> <p>With cancer incidence on the rise in Europe, the findings indicate that some countries have too few radiotherapy machines to ensure all patients receive adequate treatment.</p> <p>Every year 3.2 million people are diagnosed with cancer in Europe - in the UK alone there were more than 320,000 cases in 2010. Experts suggest that around half of patients diagnosed with cancer could benefit from radiotherapy as part of their treatment.</p> <p>Using the Directory of Radiotherapy Centres (DIRAC's) records of radiotherapy facilities, the IAEA study highlighted that several western European countries have too few machines to meet the need for radiotherapy treatment.</p> <p>Based on the number of people they estimated could be treated with each machine, the authors identified what percentage of patients with cancer in each country who would not have access to radiotherapy.</p> <p>In the UK and Germany, the results showed that 21 per cent of patients are not offered radiotherapy. Austria's figure for unmet need followed at 20 per cent, then Portugal (19 per cent) and Italy (16 per cent).</p> <p>Nordic countries, Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands were found to be more well-equipped to meet treatment demands.</p> <p>While eastern and southeastern European countries were found to have the greatest need to modernise and expand equipment.</p> <p>It is hoped that the research, which was based on information from the Directory of Radiotherapy Centres (DIRAC) database, will help countries to meet growing demand for radiotherapy by allowing them to make comparisons with other nations for the first time.</p> <p>The study also looked at how services were organised across the different countries. Although a majority of 28 out of 33 countries split radiotherapy machines across a range of centres, nations like Britain and Sweden adopted a more centralised approach, with between four and 10 machines at each centre.</p> <p>The authors said that the "fragmentation" of the services could affect the "economic burden of radiotherapy and its quality".</p> <p>Though they cautioned that their study did not look at the impact that these different approaches have on cancer outcomes, they said their results warrant further investigation.</p> <p>Hilary Tovey, senior policy manager at Cancer Research UK, said the research provided a useful snapshot of radiotherapy services across Europe.</p> <p>She added: "We already know that more capacity is needed in the UK to ensure patients are not missing out. In England alone we need to double the number of linear accelerator radiotherapy machines over the next four years. At over £1million a machine this could cause an enormous headache for the NHS if it is not properly planned for.</p> <p>"Radiotherapy can help to cure some cancers. All patients should have access to the best radiotherapy for their cancer across the UK. That's why we'll continue to call for this important service to be given the priority it deserves."</p> <p>The study is published in the Lancet Oncology.</p> <p>Copyright Press Association 2013</p>