

Early diagnosis and treatment of SCC is essential for the preservation of neurological function.¹⁰⁷ However, diagnosis is frequently not established until significant neurological deficit is present, by which time functional recovery may be difficult. At this stage treatment may need to be undertaken as an emergency, often with reduced efficiency and at increased cost. Therefore, early diagnosis of SCC before the development of symptoms may allow for treatment to preserve neurological function in some patients who might otherwise be left with significant problems. This may in turn result in more efficient management of diagnostic and therapeutic staff and facilities, and reduce long-term costs of caring for disabled patients. However, none of the identified studies discussed costs or cost-effectiveness.

In the NICE clinical guideline for MSCC,¹⁵ the cost of each MRI scan during normal working hours (i.e. Monday to Friday 0900 to 1700) has been assumed to be £244 on the basis of the national NHS unit cost information. The cost of an MRI scan increases up to £3878 if it is carried out during the extended opening hours (i.e. Monday to Friday between 0800 and 0900 and between 1700 and 2000; and on Saturday and Sunday between 0900 and 1500). These costs should be interpreted with some caution as the guideline had used the NHS reference costs of 2006/7. The guideline also estimated costs of different types of treatment.¹⁵ It has been estimated that radiotherapy per patient, including its administration and treating complications, would cost £1276.50. The costs of vertebroplasty and major surgery were estimated to be £9350 and £13,094, respectively. The guideline also estimated cost of patient care. Those looked after at home would cost £13 or £193 depending on whether the patient was ambulant or non-ambulant. It would cost £81 for those looked after in a nursing home. Please note that these costs were estimated from the NHS reference costs of 2006/7 and therefore should be interpreted carefully.

TABLE 38 Cost estimation of MRI scan and different treatments

Treatments	Estimated cost per patient (£)
MRI scan during standard working hours	244.00
MRI scan during extended working hours	3878.00
Radiotherapy	12,760.50
Vertebroplasty	9350.00
Major surgery	13,094.00

Source: Adapted from NICE CG75.¹⁵