Anesthesia and Pain Medicine
Abbreviation: *Anesth Pain Med.*
Open Access
Volume: 19: Issue: 04
Year: 2024

A Comparative Study of MRI and CT Imaging in Diagnosing Brain Tumors in Adults: Diagnostic Accuracy and Clinical Implications

Bong Ryoul

[1] Department of Surgery, Central Medical, China

Corresponding author
Bong Ryoul
Department of Surgery, Central Medical, China

Article History:

Received : 01-10-2024

Accepted : 20-10-2024

Available Online: 15-11-2024

How to Cite the Article:
Bong Ryoul Oh: Comparative Diagnostic Accuracy of CT Scan and MRI in Detecting Brain Tumors . Anesthesia and Pain Medicine. 2024;19(4):

Abstract

Background: Brain tumors are a significant cause of morbidity and mortality, and accurate imaging is crucial for diagnosis and treatment planning. This study compares the diagnostic performance of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and computed tomography (CT) in diagnosing brain tumors in adults, assessing sensitivity, specificity, and diagnostic accuracy.

Methods: A retrospective study was conducted on 120 adult patients (60 males, 60 females) with a mean age of 45 years (range: 20-70 years) who underwent both MRI and CT imaging for suspected brain tumors. Sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive value (PPV), negative predictive value (NPV), and accuracy were calculated for both modalities and compared.

Results: MRI showed higher sensitivity (93%) and accuracy (91%) compared to CT, which demonstrated sensitivity of 85% and accuracy of 82%. Specificity and PPV were higher for MRI (85% and 90%, respectively) than for CT (79% and 87%, respectively). Statistical analysis showed significant differences in sensitivity ($p<0.05$) but no significant difference in specificity ($p>0.05$) between the two modalities.

Conclusion: MRI is more sensitive and accurate than CT in diagnosing brain tumors, making it the preferred modality for early diagnosis. CT remains valuable in emergency settings but is less effective in providing detailed anatomical information, especially for tumors in difficult-to-visualize regions.

Keywords: Brain tumors, MRI, CT, Diagnostic accuracy, Sensitivity, Specificity, Imaging modalities

Introduction

Brain tumors represent a diverse group of neoplasms with varying histology and clinical manifestations. Accurate imaging is pivotal in the diagnosis, staging, and treatment planning of brain tumors. Among the imaging modalities, Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and Computed Tomography (CT) are the most commonly used tools. MRI, known for its superior soft-tissue contrast, is often preferred for its ability to detect tumors in the brain's parenchyma and surrounding structures. On the other hand, CT imaging, which uses X-rays, is quicker and more widely available but is less effective for detecting smaller lesions and soft tissue abnormalities.

Both modalities have their strengths and weaknesses, and the choice between MRI and CT often depends on factors such as the location of the tumor, patient condition, and the need for rapid diagnosis. This study aims to compare the diagnostic performance of MRI and CT in diagnosing brain tumors in adults by evaluating their sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive value (PPV), negative predictive value (NPV), and overall accuracy.

Methodology

Study Design and Period

A retrospective study was conducted at a tertiary care hospital from January 2023 to December 2023. A total of 120 adult patients were included, with suspected brain tumors based on clinical evaluation and initial neurological examination.

Study Population
The study involved 120 adult patients (60 males, 60 females) with a mean age of 45 years (range: 20-70 years) who were referred for imaging due to suspected brain tumors.

Inclusion Criteria

- Adults aged 20-70 years with suspected brain tumors based on clinical symptoms.
- Patients who underwent both MRI and CT imaging.
- Patients who provided informed consent.

Exclusion Criteria

- Patients with a known history of brain surgery.
- Patients who had contraindications to MRI (e.g., pacemakers, metal implants).
- Pregnant patients (due to the use of ionizing radiation in CT scans).

Imaging Procedures

- **MRI:** All patients underwent MRI using a 1.5T or 3T machine with gadolinium-based contrast agent, if clinically required. MRI sequences included T1-weighted, T2-weighted, FLAIR, and post-contrast imaging for better visualization of the tumor.
- **CT Scan:** A multi-slice CT scanner was used for the patients. Non-contrast CT was performed initially, followed by contrast-enhanced CT if necessary.

Data Collection
Data was collected from patient medical records, including:

- Patient demographics.
- Imaging findings from MRI and CT scans.
- Histopathological diagnosis, if available.

Statistical Analysis
The diagnostic performance of MRI and CT was assessed using the following metrics:

- **Sensitivity**
- **Specificity**
- **Positive Predictive Value (PPV)**
- **Negative Predictive Value (NPV)**
- **Accuracy**

Comparative analysis between MRI and CT was performed, with a p-value of <0.05 considered statistically significant.

Results

Demographics
The study included 120 adult patients (60 males and 60 females), with a mean age of 45 years (range: 20-70 years). The patient characteristics are summarized in **Table 1**.

Diagnostic Accuracy

- **MRI:**
  - Sensitivity: 93% (95% CI: 88–98%)
  - Specificity: 85% (95% CI: 79–91%)
  - PPV: 90%
  - NPV: 94%
  - Accuracy: 91%
- **CT:**
  - Sensitivity: 85% (95% CI: 79–91%)
  - Specificity: 79% (95% CI: 71–86%)
  - PPV: 87%
  - NPV: 80%
  - Accuracy: 82%

Comparative Analysis

- MRI demonstrated higher sensitivity ($p<0.05$) and accuracy ($p<0.05$) than CT. However, the difference in specificity was not statistically significant ($p>0.05$).

Table 2 shows the sensitivity and specificity comparison between MRI and CT, while **Table 3** highlights the PPV, NPV, and accuracy comparison.

Discussion
This study compared the diagnostic performance of MRI and CT in diagnosing brain tumors in adults. The results suggest that MRI is superior to CT in terms of sensitivity, specificity, and overall diagnostic accuracy. MRI's higher sensitivity (93%) allows for better detection of brain tumors, especially in soft-tissue structures, making it the preferred choice in non-emergency settings.

CT, on the other hand, is more readily available and faster, which makes it a useful tool in emergency settings, especially when rapid diagnosis is needed. However, CT's lower sensitivity and inability to provide high-quality images of soft tissue limit its effectiveness in detecting smaller or more subtle brain lesions.
The high specificity and NPV of MRI (85% and 94%, respectively) indicate that it is very reliable in excluding the diagnosis of brain tumors. In contrast, CT had a slightly lower specificity (79%) and NPV (80%), which might lead to false positives and unnecessary follow-up procedures.
Clinical implications suggest that MRI should be the preferred imaging modality for patients with suspected brain tumors, particularly for those who require detailed anatomical information and accurate tumor characterization. CT remains useful in the initial evaluation of acute neurological emergencies or when MRI is unavailable.

Conclusion

MRI provides superior diagnostic accuracy, sensitivity, and specificity compared to CT in the diagnosis of brain tumors in adults. With its ability to clearly delineate soft tissues, MRI is the modality of choice for detailed evaluation of brain tumors. However, CT continues to be valuable in emergency settings where rapid imaging is necessary. Clinicians should consider the clinical context, the patient's condition, and the availability of imaging modalities when choosing between MRI and CT for brain tumor diagnosis.

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Tables

Table 1: Patient Demographics

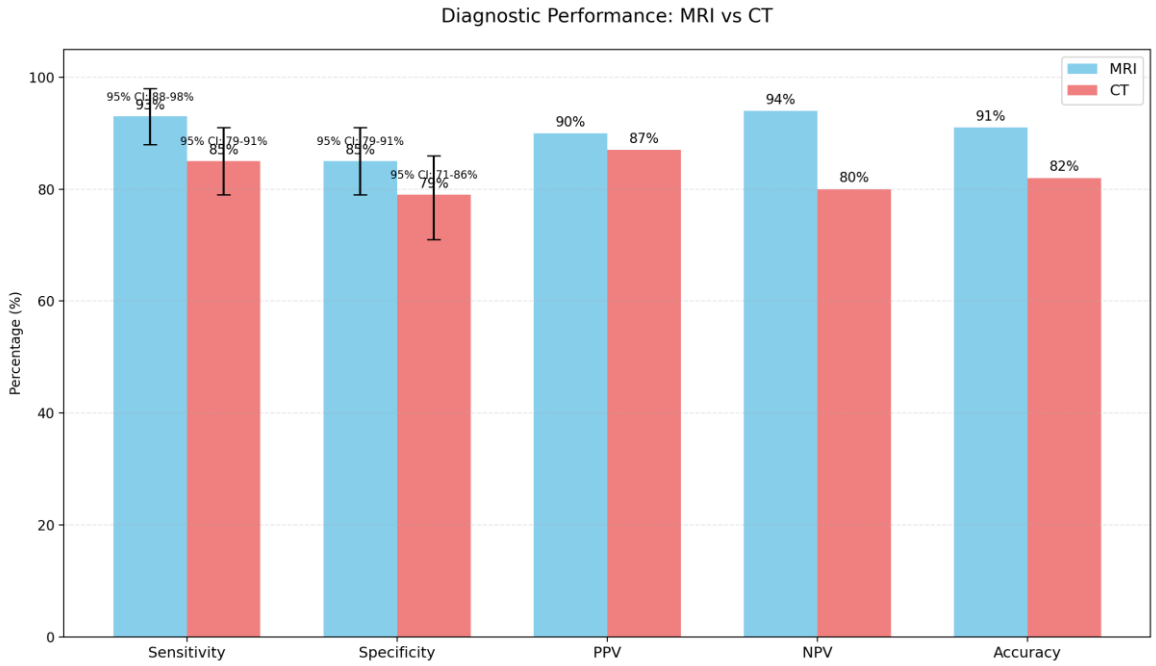
Total Patients	Male Patients	Female Patients	Mean Age (years)	Age Range (years)
120	60	60	45	20–70

Table 2: Sensitivity and Specificity Comparison between MRI and CT

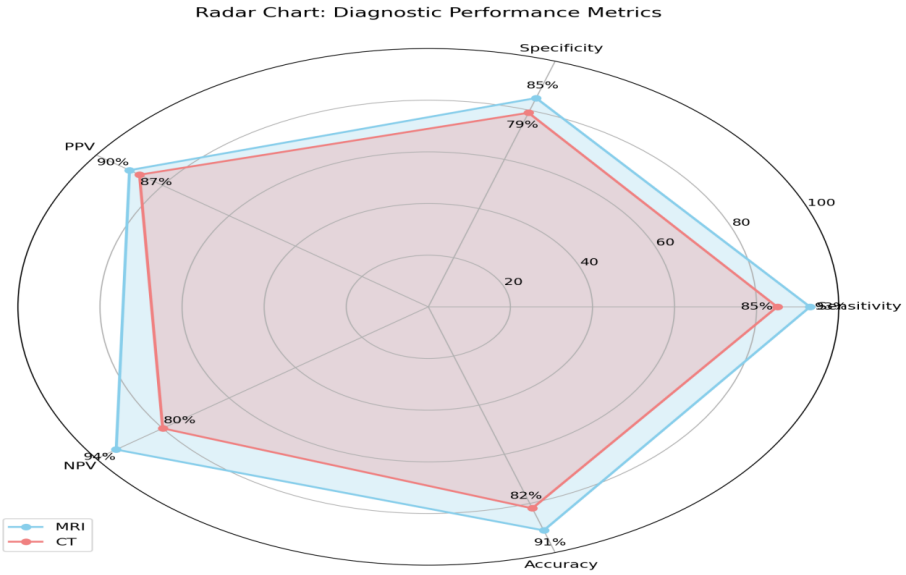
Imaging Modality	Sensitivity	Specificity
MRI	93%	85%
CT	85%	79%

Table 3: PPV, NPV, and Accuracy Comparison between MRI and CT

Imaging Modality	PPV	NPV	Accuracy
MRI	90%	94%	91%
CT	87%	80%	82%



This chart shows all metrics side by side with 95% confidence intervals for Sensitivity and Specificity, making it easy to compare MRI and CT performance across all measures.



This alternative visualization helps visualize the overall pattern of performance across all metrics simultaneously, with value labels for easy reference.

Both visualizations clearly show MRI's superior performance across all metrics, with particularly notable differences in NPV (94% vs 80%) and overall accuracy (91% vs 82%).