Hip pain has always presented a diagnostic challenge, with causes ranging from sports injuries to spinal problems, from fractures to joint degeneration. Today, though, radiologists specially trained in musculoskeletal conditions select from better imaging options—leading to more ready answers to this common complaint.

In the hands of the radiologist with subspecialty training, MR imaging has become the modality of choice for revealing the causes of hip pain. The experienced radiologist can also selectively bring to bear CT, X-ray and ultrasound to provide a detailed opinion that typically determines the course of care.

“Hip pain doesn’t have to be a mystery or require process-of-elimination treatments,” said Lourdes Imaging Associates (LIA) radiologist Jeffrey Mathews, MD, who completed a fellowship in musculoskeletal radiology and neuroradiology at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital.

The Special Role of MR Imaging
Hip pain may or may not have anything to do with the hip. And, pain that includes or is related to the hip may also involve the pelvis, groin, buttocks, thigh or back. Older patients are more likely to have an acute fracture or degenerative condition, and younger patients are more likely to have a soft-tissue injury.

At Lourdes, radiology for hip pain almost always starts with an X-ray done with high-resolution digital equipment; but, MR often follows, especially if arthritic conditions are not evident. For example, stress fractures—so common in both athletes (fatigue fractures) and the elderly (insufficiency fractures)—are better diagnosed in their early stages with MR imaging. “We can see the stress response in the bone,” said Dr. Mathews.

Lourdes musculoskeletal radiologists rely on MR imaging for diagnosing the myriad causes of hip pain. This imaging modality is effective for evaluating possible labral tears, muscle strains, tendinopathy, impingement or athletic pubalgia (sports hernia). MR arthrography in particular reveals the internal structures of the joint (especially effective for identifying labral tears). The radiologist injects contrast into the hip to expand spacing in soft-tissue structures for better imaging (see image).

Diagnosis of hip pain illustrates the level of sophistication in training and imaging available today in musculoskeletal radiology.

“If a patient arrives with an order for an MR, we may advise an MR arthrogram instead,” said LIA radiologist Nitit Tank, MD, also a graduate of the Jefferson musculoskeletal fellowship.

Referrers Thankful for Joint-Specific Expertise
Pain felt in the hip area is a common complication for people of all ages who want to stay active. Ultrasound complements MR imaging, particularly in guiding interventions such as aspiration of the hip or therapeutic injection of a nearby tendon/bursa—or the hip joint itself.

“With the advanced set-up at our new LourdesCare at Cherry Hill facility, it’s become invaluable to me to have subspecialized musculo-skeletal radiologists across the hall to consult with,” said Lourdes orthopedic surgeon Timothy J. Henderson, MD, FAAOS.

For more information, visit www.lourdesnet.org or call 1-888-LOURDES (1-888-568-7337).
MR Imaging Takes Further Strides in Comfort and Precision

Just a couple of decades ago, MR imaging was still a newer, high-end test not widely accessible outside of major university medical centers. Today, MR not only occupies a central position in radiologic imaging throughout the healthcare system, it is becoming increasingly precise while at the same time offering a more patient-friendly experience. New open-bore units at Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center, Lourdes Medical Center of Burlington County and LourdesCare at Cherry Hill are easier for patients to get in and out of and provide an experience that feels less confining.

The Siemens MAGNETOM Aera 1.5T units at Lourdes have a shorter bore (tube-like structure where the patient lies during the imaging process) and one with an opening diameter of 70 centimeters.

The design means greater comfort for all patients and ready accommodation of obese patients (up to 550 pounds). The system’s open structure decreases anxiety for many adult and pediatric patients, making the need for sedation even rarer. The MR team can also perform many exams with the patient’s head outside of the bore. For example, patients having their lower back or pelvis examined rest with their head and upper extremities outside the magnet.

“This exciting new system offers the highest level of comfort and convenience, especially for patients with claustrophobia,” said Kathleen V. Ggreatex, MD, Chief of Radiology and Nuclear Medicine, Lourdes Health System.

The new high-powered, high-field units allow not only for an easier visit for Lourdes patients, but for faster, more-detailed images that serve as the basis for confident diagnoses by the Lourdes staff. The experienced Lourdes MR team carefully follows resource-use protocols and employs this latest magnetic resonance technology in a complete range of clinical applications, including neurology, orthopedics, body imaging, angiography, cardiology, breast imaging and oncology. The state-of-the-science equipment delivers the next level of image quality and permits quicker, more-accurate reports.

Delivering first-rate MR studies, the new LourdesCare at Cherry Hill facility offers same-day appointments and evening and weekend hours. Note: Lourdes can supply physician offices with ordering pads for radiology procedures, with an easy-to-use format for selecting an imaging test or study. To request a supply of the order pads, please call Barbara O’Donnell, Administrative Director of Radiology, 856-757-3575.

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