

1 **Title**

2 A meta-analysis comparing the diagnostic performance of abbreviated MRI (ABB-MRI) and
3 a full diagnostic protocol (FDP-MRI) in breast cancer

4 **Keywords**

5 Breast, Breast Cancer, Magnetic resonance imaging, Meta-analysis, Diagnostic imaging

6 **Introduction**

7 The use of abbreviated magnetic resonance imaging (ABB-MRI) protocols in the detection of breast
8 cancer has gained increasing attention as these have substantially reduced image acquisition and
9 interpretation times. The first prospective reader study of screening patients using an abbreviated
10 breast MRI protocol was reported by Kuhl et al. and showed equivalent diagnostic performance of
11 ABB-MRI to a full diagnostic protocol (FDP)¹. Initial studies created a short protocol from an
12 existing dataset of standard breast MRIs and reported a reading study, generally showing equivalent
13 performance to the standard acquisition²⁻⁴. More recent studies have created enriched cohorts of
14 patients, for whom MRI has been used for problem solving or pre-operative staging, to assess the
15 diagnostic accuracy of ABB-MRI in a robust manner with a sufficient number of cancers^{5,6}. Varying
16 versions of the shortened protocols have been reported in these studies, with the general definition of
17 an 'abbreviated' protocol using a non-contrast T₁-weighted (T₁W) sequence with at least one post
18 contrast T₁W examination. Before the adoption of abbreviated MRI into mainstream practice it is
19 important to ensure the shortened sequences gives equivalent diagnostic performance.

20 From a radiologist's perspective it is important to assess the use of ABB-MRI in a screening context
21 and in a problem solving or pre-operative staging context separately. The advantage of an abbreviated
22 protocol for screening is the ability to reduce healthcare costs, the time patients spend in the MRI
23 scanner, as well as a reduced reading times for the radiologist. For problem solving and pre-operative
24 staging, MRI is used extensively, however the case for abbreviated MRI for this clinical question is
25 less compelling, as a full protocol is more likely to be more diagnostically useful. In order to adopt

26 abbreviated MRI for screening, prospective trials need to be undertaken with careful comparison
27 between abbreviated MRI and standard MRI protocols. However, in order to do this safely,
28 assimilation of the evidence is required to show equivalence or at least non-inferiority using published
29 data before a randomised trial is undertaken.

30 While several review articles have examined the protocols and diagnostic performances of published
31 ABB-MRI studies⁷⁻¹³, to date no meta-analysis has been performed that systematically compares the
32 diagnostic performance of ABB-MRI with full diagnostic protocol MRI (FDP-MRI). This meta-
33 analysis examines the evidence from screening only cohorts and separately from enriched cohorts.

34 **Materials and Methods**

35 This meta-analysis was performed according to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews
36 and Meta-Analysis for Diagnostic Test Accuracy (PRISMA-DTA) guidelines¹⁴ (PRISMA checklist
37 available as Electronic Supplementary Material).

38

39 **Literature Search**

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41 PubMed and EMBASE databases were searched in August 2019 by one of the authors (X.X.X., with
42 2 years of experience) for studies assessing the diagnostic performance of abbreviated MRI protocols
43 in the detection of breast cancer in either a screening or an enriched cohort of women. The patient
44 population of screening studies consisted of screening mild-moderate or high-risk women, including
45 women with a personal history of breast cancer. The patient population of enriched cohort studies
46 included either combinations of screening, suspicious and known cancer cases or cases selected by the
47 authors. The search strategy used was ((breast)) AND abbreviated) AND (MR OR MRI OR magnetic
48 resonance imaging)). A full manual search of reference lists from all included studies was also
49 undertaken.

50 **Study selection**

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52 Studies were included if they met the following eligibility criteria: (1) published in a peer reviewed
53 journal (abstracts and conference proceedings excluded), (2) in English, (3) the patient population was
54 reported and included either a screening cohort or an enriched cohort of patients, (4) details of the full
55 and abbreviated protocols were reported, (5) the diagnostic performance of both ABB-MRI and FDP-
56 MRI in the detection of breast cancer was reported. Studies focusing on the development of an
57 abbreviated protocol or technique were excluded.

58

59 **Data extraction**

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61 Data extraction was performed independently by two reviewers (X.X.X. and X.X.) and confirmed by
62 two other reviewers (X.X.X. and X.X.X.). The following information was obtained from studies: first
63 author, publication year, prospective or retrospective study design, number of patients, number of
64 cancers, ABB-MRI and FDP-MRI protocol sequences, number of readers and experience in years,
65 examination times and reading times of ABB-MRI and FDP-MRI, and interval of time between
66 reading ABB-MRI and FDP-MRI.

67 The sensitivity and specificity of ABB-MRI and FDP-MRI protocols for each study was recorded.

68 The number of true-positive (TP), false-negative (FN), false-positive (FP) and true-negative (TN)
69 findings using ABB-MRI and FDP-MRI were either extracted from studies where reported or
70 calculated from the number of included cancers. For studies that reported multiple readers, the
71 number of TP/FN/FP/TN were extracted from only the first reader to ensure integer numbers of
72 lesions for the meta-analysis. For studies that reported multiple ABB-MRI protocols, the diagnostic
73 performance of the protocol that used a contrast-enhanced sequence and the smallest number of
74 additional sequences was extracted.

75 **Data Quality Assessment**

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77 The Quality Assessment of Diagnostic Accuracy Studies-2 was used to assess the risk of bias and
78 concerns regarding applicability to the review question¹⁵. Risk of bias was assessed in four domains:

79 patient selection (e.g. mild-moderate or high risk patients for screening studies), appropriate index test
80 (interpretation of ABB-MRI and FDP-MRI protocols without knowledge of final diagnosis,
81 appropriate length of time or blinding between reading of ABB-MRI and FDP-MRI protocols),
82 reference standard (use of histological analysis or follow-up), and flow and timing. The degree of
83 heterogeneity between studies was assessed using the Cochran Q test¹⁶ and the Higgins I^2 test¹⁷. A p-
84 value of < 0.05 for the Cochran Q test or an I^2 value of greater than 50% indicated statistically
85 significant heterogeneity.

86

87 **Statistical Analysis**

88 Forest plots of sensitivity and specificity for included studies were constructed. The bivariate model
89 of Reitsma et al.¹⁸ was used to estimate pooled sensitivities, specificities and areas under the curve
90 (AUCs) for ABB-MRI and FDP-MRI on a per-lesion basis, and summary receiver operating
91 characteristic (sROC) curves were constructed. Screening studies and enriched cohort studies were
92 pooled separately to avoid bias. Additionally, the exam times, reading times, sensitivities and
93 specificities of ABB-MRI and FDP-MRI for all studies were compared using a paired t-test, with a p-
94 value < 0.05 indicating a statistically significant result. Analysis was performed using statistical
95 software (R version 3.1.3; R Foundation for Statistical Computing, Vienna, Austria) using the *mada*
96 package.

97 **Results**

98 **Study Selection and Data Extraction**

99

100 The literature search of the PubMed and EMBASE databases returned 63 studies after removing
101 duplicates. We excluded 30 studies after a review of the titles and abstracts. We reviewed the full text
102 of the remaining 33 studies and excluded 20 as they did not meet the eligibility criteria. 13 studies (5
103 screening studies and 8 enriched cohort studies) were included in the meta-analysis^{1,2,5,6,19-27}. One

104 study was excluded as the patient population contained a subset of patients previously reported by the
105 authors in a study included in the meta-analysis²⁸. Our study selection process is shown in Fig. 1.

106 Details of included screening and enriched cohort studies are given in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.
107 Screening studies included 2588 patients with 62 cancers. Enriched cohort studies included 1432
108 patients with 540 cancers. Technical details of included studies are given in Table 3. There was a
109 large variation in patient population, study methodology and ABB-MRI protocols reported in
110 included studies. All studies used at least one pre-contrast and one post-contrast sequence in their
111 abbreviated protocol. The mean exam time was 7.4 minutes for ABB-MRI and 19.2 minutes for FDP-
112 MRI ($p = 0.002$). The mean reading time was 1.4 minutes for ABB-MRI and 3.8 minutes for FDP-
113 MRI ($p = 0.01$). The time between reading protocols ranged from immediately after to one month
114 after. The majority of readers involved in studies had over 6 years of experience.

115

116 **Data Quality Assessment**

117 Figure 2 shows the results of QUADAS-2 assessment. For patient selection, some enriched cohort
118 studies were found to have applicability concerns due to a combination of screening and patients with
119 known cancers. For index tests, risks of bias found were due to either lack of reporting of the time
120 between the reading of the ABB-MRI and FDP-MRI protocols (unclear risk) or the reading of the
121 FDP-MRI directly after the ABB-MRI protocol (high risk). The use of a reference standard was
122 unclear for one study. Regarding flow and timing, all studies were considered to have a low risk of
123 bias.

124 **Statistical Analysis**

125 The results of pooled analysis are given in Table 4. Low heterogeneity was measured between studies
126 using enriched cohorts. I^2 values of 0% were measured for screening studies using both ABB-MRI
127 and FDP-MRI, however this was due to an insufficient number of studies included to use this
128 technique as opposed to lack of heterogeneity.

129 Forest plots for sensitivity and specificity are shown in Fig. 3. For screening studies, the confidence
130 intervals are large, and are much larger for sensitivity than for specificity due to the very small
131 number of cancers in proportion to normal cases (n = 62 for 2588 patients for all screening studies
132 combined). For enriched cohort studies with a more balanced number of cancers and normal cases,
133 the confidence intervals are more similar, though the confidence intervals are still large overall.

134 Summary receiver operating characteristic curves are shown in Fig. 4. FDP-MRI achieved a higher
135 sensitivity, specificity and AUC than ABB-MRI for both screening and enriched cohort studies. The
136 difference in diagnostic performance between ABB-MRI and FDP-MRI was lower for enriched
137 cohort studies. However, the sensitivities and specificities of ABB-MRI and FDP-MRI were not
138 statistically significantly different for screening studies or enriched cohort studies (p = 0.18 and 0.27,
139 p = 0.18 and 0.93, respectively). The pooled AUC for ABB-MRI was the same for screening and
140 enriched cohorts.

141 **Discussion**

142

143 Our meta-analysis showed that in a screening setting, the diagnostic accuracy of abbreviated MRI was
144 lower but not statistically significantly different to the full diagnostic protocol (pooled AUCs 0.94 and
145 0.97, respectively). For studies that used enriched cohorts, the performance of abbreviated MRI
146 matched that of the standard protocol (pooled AUCs 0.94 and 0.95, respectively).

147

148 Comparison and pooling of ABB-MRI studies through a meta-analysis is complicated by the variation
149 in patient populations reported as sensitivity and specificity performance can be altered by the
150 expected prevalence of cancers in the cohort. It is better not to group abbreviated protocols used for
151 screening and for other clinical indications together. Amongst screening studies, Kuhl et al. and Chen
152 et al. reported results from screening mild or moderate risk patients^{1,25}, whereas Panigrahi et al. and
153 Dialani et al. reported results from screening high risk patients^{22,23}. The effective rate of detected
154 cancers will differ between these two groups, and therefore it may not be meaningful to pool their
155 diagnostic performances. Furthermore, though there was a variation in patient populations, an I² of

156 0% was measured between screening studies indicating no heterogeneity. However, it has been shown
157 that conclusions of low heterogeneity for a meta-analysis with a small number of studies are
158 unjustified as confidence intervals for these heterogeneity estimates are large^{17,29}. Results from
159 screening studies may also be underpowered due to the large number of normal cases, where
160 specificity will be inherently comparable for ABB-MRI and FDP-MRI and the low number of cancer
161 cases results in sensitivity values with large confidence intervals. Amongst enriched cohort studies,
162 Moschetta et al. reported a cohort of combined screening, problem solving and preoperative staging
163 patients⁵. Bickelhaupt et al. reported a cohort of patients with suspicious mammograms²¹. Grimm et
164 al. reported a cohort of selected cases with a balanced number of cancers and benign and normal cases
165², though the readers were blinded to the percentage of each case. It is unclear what effect these
166 combinations of patients within a population would have on reading images. While enriched cohorts
167 were able to demonstrate equivalent performance to a full diagnostic protocol, they do not reflect the
168 clinical setting of interest and may not be applicable in a screening setting.

169

170 Other than differences in patient population, the assessment of the quality of studies included in the
171 meta-analysis using QUADAS-2 highlighted other variations in study design. Given the claims of
172 equivalent diagnostic performance to standard protocols, it is important to scrutinise the methodology
173 of these reader studies before it is possible to safely adopt abbreviated MRI into clinical practice.
174 While some studies left up to a month between reading images from different protocols, some read
175 the full protocol directly after the abbreviated protocol. This may be appropriate when assessing
176 changes in management with the addition of extra sequences, however both protocols must be tested
177 equally to robustly compare the diagnostic performance of ABB-MRI and FDP-MRI. Given that most
178 studies were performed by readers with many years of experience, it may be that the high diagnostic
179 accuracy and faster reading times achieved using abbreviated protocols would not be possible with
180 less experienced readers. Furthermore, readers in retrospective studies would not be afraid of
181 misdiagnoses and may perform differently when reading images in a real clinical setting. Only three
182 of the studies included were prospective studies, and larger prospective and multi-centre trials with
183 defined inclusion criteria are required to validate the performance of ABB-MRI in a purely screening

184 setting. The lack of precision in pooled estimates also necessitates large prospective trials, given that
185 the lower end of the ranges of the sensitivity and specificity of ABB-MRI in a screening setting (79%
186 and 86%, respectively) are not good enough to be used in a screening situation and unlikely to be
187 cost-effective. There are multiple ongoing prospective studies, the largest being the multi-centre
188 EA1141 trial (Comparison of AB-MRI and DBT in Breast Cancer Screening in Women with Dense
189 Breasts), finding a higher rate of invasive cancer detection using ABB-MRI compared to digital breast
190 tomosynthesis (DBT) in a screening cohort of 1444 women with dense breasts and only mild to
191 moderate risk of breast cancer^{30,31}.

192

193 The various reported ABB-MRI protocols have been previously reviewed^{7,10,12}. In this meta-analysis,
194 only one set of reported sensitivity and specificity values were extracted from each study to avoid
195 overrepresentation of a sample, although many studies have compared the diagnostic performance of
196 multiple combinations of sequences to investigate the added value of extra sequences in increasing
197 specificity and confidence in diagnosis. Overall, studies have dropped the full dynamic time course in
198 order to save time, opting for one pre-contrast and one post-contrast time point. Grimm et al. found
199 that the addition of a second post-contrast time point did not improve diagnostic accuracy². Different
200 studies added either a T₂-weighted (T₂W) sequence or a diffusion-weighted examination to
201 complement the contrast examination. Dialani et al. found that the addition of a T₂W sequence did not
202 result in a significant change in management²². A second abbreviated protocol including a diffusion-
203 weighted imaging (DWI) sequence was used by Bickelhaupt et al. which performed better than the
204 protocol using only contrast-enhanced images, matching the accuracy of the full diagnostic protocol
205²¹. Chen et al. also found that the addition of DWI improved sensitivity and specificity²⁴. There is a
206 growing interest in non-contrast-enhanced screening and DWI is increasingly used in the detection of
207 breast cancer, with advanced DWI techniques showing a high sensitivity and specificity in the
208 characterisation of breast lesions^{32,33}.

209 Our study has several limitations. Firstly, there were a low number of studies contributing to the
210 pooled estimates resulting in relatively wide confidence intervals, particularly for screening studies.

211 Second, there were many studies that investigated the diagnostic performance of ABB-MRI but did
212 not perform a reader study for the full diagnostic protocol and were therefore not included in the
213 meta-analysis. It has been shown that different results are obtained when pooling non-comparative
214 studies (evaluating only one test) and comparative studies (evaluating both tests equally)³⁴. As such,
215 robustly designed comparative studies where all patients received both tests under the same
216 conditions were preferred. Third, while separate pooled analysis was carried out for screening and
217 enriched cohort studies, there were still variations in patient populations within these groups. Fourth,
218 it was unclear if there was an overlap between patient populations in two studies (both by Chen et al.
219 ^{24,25}) which could result in overrepresentation of a sample in pooled estimates, though the full
220 protocols reported were sufficiently different. The authors could not be contacted for clarification.
221 Fifth, as each study population could be used only once, the meta-analysis did not incorporate the
222 potential added value of additional sequences that were investigated in some studies.

223 In conclusion, our meta-analysis of 13 studies found that abbreviated MRI had an overall high
224 diagnostic performance in the detection of breast cancer. The diagnostic performance was equivalent
225 to that of a full diagnostic protocol amongst enriched cohorts and was lower but not significantly
226 different in a screening setting. While acquisition and interpretation times were significantly reduced
227 compared to a full diagnostic protocol, there was a variation in study methodology and sequences
228 chosen, limiting the conclusions that can be drawn. Further large prospective multicentre trials are
229 required to validate ABB-MRI in a real screening environment.

230 **References**

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331 **Figure Legends**

332 **Fig. 1.** PRISMA flow diagram for study selection and exclusion

333 **Fig. 2.** Results of quality assessment using QUADAS-2

334 **Fig. 3.** Forest plots of the sensitivity and specificity of full diagnostic protocol MRI (FDP-MRI) and
335 abbreviated MRI (ABB-MRI) for included A) screening and B) enriched cohort studies with 95%
336 confidence intervals. Vertical lines denote pooled summary estimates of sensitivity and specificity.

337 **Fig. 4.** Summary receiver operating characteristics (ROC) curves for abbreviated MRI (ABB-MRI) and
338 full diagnostic protocol MRI (FDP-MRI) protocols using the bivariate model with 95% confidence
339 regions. The pooled AUCs of ABB-MRI and FDP-MRI for screening studies were 0.94 and 0.97,
340 respectively. The pooled AUCs of ABB-MRI and FDP-MRI for enriched cohort studies were 0.94 and
341 0.95, respectively.

342 **Table Legends**

343 **Table 1.** Characteristics of Included Screening Studies

344 **Table 2.** Characteristics of Included Enriched Cohort Studies

345 **Table 3.** Technical details of included studies

346 **Table 4.** Results of pooled analysis

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