



The Royal Australian and New Zealand
College of Radiologists®

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The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists



STATEMENT

Unnecessary CT Scans

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists (RANZCR), the peak professional body for Radiology specialists in Australia, supports and promotes the appropriate use of diagnostic and interventional radiology tests and procedures.

Dr Matthew Andrews, President of RANZCR has endorsed the concerns raised by Dr Tony Webber, Director of Medicare's Professional Services Review, about the inappropriate use of CT scans.

However, Dr Andrews said that this concern about CT should not be about blaming doctors. He said that Radiologists are always concerned to minimise all risks including radiation risks to patients from ionising imaging examinations; but the problem with inappropriate use of CT scans is as much related to Government policy as it is to inappropriate referrals. Blaming doctors and particularly GPs for requesting unnecessary or inappropriate tests is unhelpful.

Dr Andrews went on to say that successive Governments have contributed to the increasing exposure of the community to ionising radiation from unnecessary CT scans by restricting patient access to MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scans, which are a safer alternative using no x-rays and thus having no cancer risk.

The RANZCR has sought changes to this policy for more than 10 years. By limiting access to specialist referral and by not allowing Radiologists to substitute a safer or even better test, when an inappropriate scan is requested, the Government has restricted patient rebates for safer MRI scans.

Australia has one of the lowest levels of patient access to MRI amongst OECD countries, 5.6 per million population compared with the OECD average of 11 per million in 2007. We encourage the Government to expand access to MRI, to make Radiologists central to image management and to encourage improvements in the training of doctors.

Certainly there has been a deficiency of medical education to train medical students and young doctors in the most appropriate approach to imaging their patients. This is something we have raised with medical schools and pre-vocational training programs and we are keen to assist them. However, the problem of restricted access to MRI is not the fault of GPs or Radiologists and is something that the Government can fix.

The RANZCR believes that radiology tests and procedures should be undertaken where clinically indicated, and where the risk versus benefit has been considered. A multifaceted approach to more appropriate use of radiology services is required involving referrers, consumers and the entire radiology industry. Radiologists are central to this approach as they have the expertise to provide guidance on the most appropriate imaging procedures.

The RANZCR through its Quality Use of Diagnostic Imaging Program has been addressing these and other quality and safety issues. With funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing the RANZCR has undertaken many projects aimed at supporting and promoting the appropriate use of diagnostic and interventional diagnostic imaging, including:

- *InsideRadiology (www.insideradiology.com.au) - provides a high quality web based resource with information (including risks and benefits) for consumers and health care providers.*

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- *CT Dose Optimisation Quality Improvement Activities – to assist radiology practices to minimise the radiation dose during CT examinations*
- *Best practice standards for radiology referrals – to promote radiology referrals that include sufficient clinical information to allow the radiologist to determine the most appropriate test (although under the current Medicare system, radiologists have limited scope to substitute tests).*
- *Radiology Events Register (RaER) collates and supports analysis of adverse events and near misses in radiology. The ultimate aim is to provide evidence to support improvements in radiology practice.*
- *RANZCR and the National Institute of Clinical Studies have sponsored fellowships in evidence implementation, training radiologists in the art and science of supporting clinicians' use of evidence-based, appropriate diagnostic imaging.*

In addition, the RANZCR has endorsed the use of Diagnostic Imaging Pathways, a clinical decision support tool and educational resource developed in Western Australia which can assist referrers and providers in achieving the appropriate application of medical imaging technology to diagnosis.