

Insuring Diagnostic Imaging Facilities in Canada

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There are approximately 561 CT and 366 MR imaging scanners in Canada. Diagnostic imaging services are mostly delivered in publicly funded hospitals. About 10% of CT and MR imaging services are offered through private clinics, according to the 2017 Canadian Medical Imaging Inventory by the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health (CADTH). (1) There are approximately 59 private-payer MR imaging and CT facilities across Canada. They have locations in a subset of provinces in the urban areas of British Columbia (BC), Alberta, Quebec, and Nova Scotia. In Ontario hospitals alone, there are approximately 184 CT scanners and 120 MR imaging scanners. (1)

Inside Canada's Private Diagnostic Imaging Clinics

Diagnostic services range from MRI scans, CT scans, to ultrasounds, using advanced medical imaging equipment for each type of exam. Radiologists communicate with individual patients to determine which exam is most appropriate for each individual case. To this end, radiologists review and protocol exam requests when booking exams, communicating with the patient's GP and the physician to ensure the patient receives all the needed exams.

Multidisciplinary Teams: Radiologists are the specialists who interpret MRIs, CTs, and ultrasounds and provide patients' doctors with the results. Private diagnostic clinics often comprise teams of radiologists, who bring a variety of sub-specialty skills to the clinic. These skills could include musculoskeletal, neurologic, and abdominal diagnostic imaging. Private clinics use a multidisciplinary team approach and are able to consult freely with each other in the event of challenging or difficult cases, offering a depth and breadth of knowledge to their patients.

Equipment: Advanced medical imaging equipment comes in different makes and models. For example, MRI machines have many different configurations as to their size, shape, and strength. Since MRIs, CTs, and Ultrasound machines all look at body parts in different ways, it's important to use the right machine for the particular situation.

Policy and Regulations: Each province and territory is responsible for its own diagnostic imaging under the five principles of the Canada Health Act: public administration, comprehensiveness, universality, portability, and accessibility. (2) CT and MR imaging fees in Canadian provinces are either tied to the provincial fee schedule or negotiated regionally.

Understanding Potential Liability Exposures

In recent years, there is growing concern about potential health hazards associated with imaging exams that use radiation - particularly CT exams because they account for the majority of total radiation received by patients from any imaging modalities.

According to a survey by the CADTH, 80% of facilities have a process in place for determining the appropriateness of imaging exams. In addition, a CADTH Canada-wide survey of awareness and implementation of the 10 priorities of the Bonn Call for Action on radiation protection indicated most respondents reported at least partial implementation (with intent toward further implementation) at their institutions and in Canadian clinical practice to improve radiation safety. (1) While the findings look optimistic, poor patient outcomes of any kind could result in the imaging facilities having to defend themselves in a court case.

Another concern for diagnostic imaging facilities is the maintenance and upkeep of their highly complex equipment. Imaging clinics must not only ensure their machinery is working properly, but also must track the equipment life cycle so they can plan to replace the equipment or any of its parts. Failing to do so could result in interrupted operations or machine malfunctions that result in poor patient outcomes.

The MedThree Advantage

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Sources:

1. https://www.cadth.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/canadian_medical_imaging_inventory_2017.pdf
2. <http://www.ajnr.org/content/39/10/1785>