

Diagnostic Imaging Clinics

March 9, 2022

New federal investments in medical imaging will reduce wait times, according to a survey commissioned by the Canadian Association of Radiologists (CAR) in January 2022. In it, nine out of ten respondents to a survey commissioned by) support new federal investments in medical imaging to reduce wait times.

CAR's President Dr. Gilles Soulez commented that Canadians understand the importance of medical imaging in our health infrastructure, and that without investment in equipment and personnel, the health of our patients is at risk. "This survey, conducted in January 2022, reinforces what we have been saying: The time to act is now." (1)

Before the pandemic, Canadians were waiting an average of 50 to 82 days for CT scans and 89 days for MRI scans. This is 20 to 52 days longer than the recommended 30-day wait time. Conference Board of Canada estimates that average wait times for a CT and an MRI in 2022 would be 67 days and 133 days, respectively, far exceeding the acceptable 30-day standard, resulting in a net loss of \$3.5 billion in lost economic output as a result of missed workdays. (1)

To prepare for the influx of patients in the healthcare system, CAR is urging the federal government to help address the significant backlog for medical imaging. Association members are advocating for a federal investment of \$1.5 billion over five years for medical imaging equipment and front-line human resources in response to growing wait times and burnout. Furthermore, support for a national e-referral program and harnessing AI for the strategic allocation of resources are also seen as critical to protecting Canadians' access to lifesaving medical imagery over the long run.

Playing a Vital Role in Canada's Healthcare System

Diagnostic health imaging has transformed healthcare, allowing for earlier diagnosis of medical conditions, reducing the need for unnecessary invasive exploratory procedures and creating better patient outcomes.

Diagnostic services include MRI scans, CT scans, and ultrasounds, using advanced medical imaging equipment for each type of exam. Individual radiologists work with

patients to determine which exam is most appropriate for their situation. In order to ensure the patient receives all the needed exams, radiologists review and protocol exam requests when booking exams, communicating with the patient's primary care physician.

Teams of radiologists are often assembled in private diagnostic clinics, bringing a variety of subspecialty skills to the clinic. Diagnostic imaging skills might include musculoskeletal, neurologic, and abdominal imaging. Clinics that use a multidisciplinary team approach are able to consult freely with each other in cases of challenge or difficulty, offering depth and breadth of knowledge to their patients.

Diagnostic imaging is the responsibility of each province and territory 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 negotiated regionally or linked to provincial fee schedules.

Identifying Potential Liability Exposures

The number of health hazards associated with imaging exams using radiation has risen steadily in recent years, particularly those involving CT exams, which account for most of the total radiation patients receive from any imaging modality.

According to a CADTH survey, 80% of facilities have a process in place for determining the appropriateness of imaging exams. Furthermore, a CADTH Canada-wide survey of awareness and implementation of the Bonn Call for Action on radiation protection found that most respondents had implemented at least partial implementation (with the intention of further implementation) at their institutions and in Canadian clinical practice, in order to improve radiation safety. (3) While the findings seem encouraging, any poor patient outcome could force imaging facilities to defend themselves in court.

Another concern for diagnostic imaging facilities is the upkeep and maintenance of their highly complex equipment. Imaging clinics must not only make sure their equipment is working properly, but also track the equipment life cycle so they can replace the equipment or any of its parts as necessary. Failure to do so may result in interrupted operations or machine malfunctions that affect patient outcomes.

The MedThree Advantage

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Sources:

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