

**The Hong Kong College of
Family Physicians**
8th Floor, Duke of Windsor Building,
15 Hennessy Road, Hong Kong.
Tel : 2528 6618 (2 Lines)
Fax : 2866 0616
Website:
<http://medicine.org.hk/hkcfp/journal.htm>

EDITOR

Dr. Lam Tai Pong

DEPUTY EDITORS

Dr. David V.K. Chao

Dr. Wong Hung Wai

BOARD MEMBERS

Dr. Cynthia S.Y. Chan

Dr. Chan Wai Sun

Dr. Stephen Chen

Dr. Nelson K.H. Cheung

Dr. Rudolph W.M. Chow

Dr. Julie Cohen

Dr. Mina Goyal

Dr. Kwok Kon Hung

Dr. Augustine T. Lam

Dr. Cindy L.K. Lam

Dr. Lam Tai Kwan

Dr. Lam Yuen

Dr. Bernard W.K. Lau

Dr. Frederick C.T. Lee

Dr. Glenn K.L. Lee

Dr. Peter C.Y. Lee

Dr. Lawrence K.C. Leung

Dr. Ronson C.T. Li

Dr. John Mackay

Dr. Charles C.Y. Ng

Dr. Ng Chun Bor

Dr. David Owens

Dr. Raymond W.M. Pau

BUSINESS MANAGER

Dr. Betty K.M. Kwan

EDITORIAL EXECUTIVE

Ms. Teresa Lee

EDITORIAL ADVISERS

Prof. Cindy S.T. Aun

Prof. Augustine F. Cheng

Prof. Helen Chiu

Prof. Tony Dixon

Prof. Wes Fabb

Prof. S.T. Fan

Prof. A. Hedley

Prof. Walter W.K. King

Prof. C.R. Kumana

Prof. C.P. Lau

Prof. P.C. Leung

Dr. Mak Ki Yan

Prof. C.W. Ogle

Prof. Wilfred C.G. Peh

Prof. Grace Tang

Prof. Mark Tso

Prof. C.A. Van Hasselt

Prof. Jean Woo

Prof. C.Y. Yeung

Prof. R.T.T. Young

STATISTICAL CONSULTANTS

Dr. Joseph Lau

Dr. Ian Lauder

The Hong Kong Practitioner
is indexed in *Excerpta Medica*
(EMBASE).

ISSN 1027-3948

Printed & Designed By
Printhouse Production Center
Hong Kong

EDITORIAL

Radiology And Family Medicine

In the old days when the humble x-rays ruled supreme, the applications of diagnostic radiology were more readily appreciable. Many family physicians had their own x-ray machines installed in a backroom of their practices. Plain radiographs would be taken and processed on site. The main roles of imaging were to supplement a meticulously-taken clinical history and a thorough physical examination, and to aid, if not actually provide, the diagnosis to the patient's medical problems. This basic tenet still holds true today.

The field of diagnostic radiology has now developed far beyond just the usage of x-rays. Various modalities, such as colour Doppler ultrasound, computed tomography and magnetic resonance imaging have emerged in the recent two decades or so. The roles of radiologists have evolved to encompass the treatment of patients by means of needles, catheters and other devices inserted percutaneously, through blood vessels and by many different means. There have even been calls to recognize interventional radiology as a separate subspecialty, with its own system of structured training and accreditation.¹ In many centres, nuclear medicine imaging has already branched off as a distinct speciality from diagnostic radiology. Many subspecialties currently exist within the field of diagnostic radiology, including musculoskeletal, paediatric, thoracic, abdominal and neuroradiology.

Unfortunately, all these advances in diagnostic radiology have meant that the actual interpretation of these new forms of imaging are beyond the expertise of most family physicians and primary care doctors. More importantly, family physicians will also need to know the most appropriate sequence of investigations for conditions most commonly managed in the setting of family medicine, an appreciation of the limitations of any given investigation and the nature of newer imaging techniques. Knowledge of imaging technique is prerequisite to informing and preparing their patients for the imaging experience, hence allaying preconceived misconceptions and anxiety.

A direct line of communication between the family physician and the radiologist would be of immense value in patient management. In an editorial, Potchen has suggested that radiologists should function more as extenders of primary care. Radiologists can aid primary care doctors, such as family physicians, by defining the patient's problems soon after

EDITORIAL

identification at initial consultation. This approach would be less costly than a referral to a specialist, who then requests a diagnostic procedure to define the problem.² Armed with the information provided by imaging, the family physician can then decide whether to manage the patient himself, or to refer the patient to the appropriate specialist. Other means by which radiologists could transmit information to family physicians include giving continued medical education lectures with question-and-answer sessions, writing review and education articles in local journals such as *The Hong Kong Practitioner*, and making available pamphlets listing details of various radiological examinations.

Another way of ensuring that family physicians refer patients appropriately for imaging is the use of problem-based guidelines. Such guidelines have been published by organizations such as the American College of Radiology, Royal Australasian College of Radiologists and the Royal College of Radiologists of the United Kingdom.³⁻⁵ Studies on the influence of these guidelines on family medicine have shown that they are useful in reducing the rate of radiographical examinations and thus patients' exposure to radiation.^{6,7} Presently, a joint Working Group of the Hospital Authority and the Hong Kong College of Radiologists is developing a set of clinical guidelines in diagnostic radiology, which when completed, should be of significant benefit to local physicians.

Diagnostic radiology is very much technology-dependent and there is no doubt that previously unattainable clinical information and diagnoses can now be obtained rapidly and with a high degree of accuracy. Interventional radiology will continue to promote less invasive patient care, obviating the need for major surgery in many clinical conditions. The suggestion in some quarters that "high technology is largely

responsible for the skyrocketing cost of medical care" is unfounded. Properly selected investigations and minimally invasive procedures that are routinely performed by radiologists save money, improve outcomes, and minimize patient discomfort. These new technologies and techniques have enabled avoidance of expensive hospital admissions in the diagnosis and management of many cases.⁸

Family physicians should cooperate more closely and consult with their radiological colleagues. Radiologists should be more aware of the needs of family physicians and their patients, and respond accordingly. Such an approach will be beneficial to patients, and the society at large. ■

Wilfred C G Peh, FRCR, FHKCR,
FHKAM(Radiology), FAMS
Professor
Department of Diagnostic Radiology
The University of Hong Kong

References

1. Adam A. The future of interventional radiology - does it have one? *Clin Radiol* 1993;48:160-162.
2. Potchen EJ. Future of diagnostic radiology. *RadioGraphics* 1994;14:936-938.
3. American College of Radiology. *Appropriateness Criteria*. 1995.
4. Royal Australasian College of Radiologists. *Imaging Guidelines*. 2nd ed. 1993.
5. Royal College of Radiologists. *Making the Best Use of a Department of Clinical Radiology*. 3rd Ed. 1995.
6. Royal College of Radiologists Working Party. Influence of Royal College of Radiologists' guidelines on referral from general practice. *Br Med J* 1993;306:110-111.
7. Oakeshott P, Kerry SM, Williams JE. Randomized controlled trial of the effect of the Royal College of Radiologists' guidelines on general practitioners' referrals for radiographic examination. *Br J Gen Pract* 1994;44:197-200.
8. Heilman RS. High tech equals high cost in medicine: does it really? *RadioGraphics* 1994;14:1004.