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NEWS

RSNA Press Release

Most Patients in the Dark about What Radiologists Do

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At A Glance

- In a recent survey of patients undergoing CT, more than 64 percent of respondents reported they had little or no idea what radiologists do.
- Print and electronic materials, advertising and social media are among the ways that some institutions and organizations have worked to increase awareness of the profession.
- RSNA is launching "Radiology Cares: the art of patient-centered practice."

CHICAGO—The role of radiologists in healthcare has long been poorly understood among the general public, but new research presented today at the annual meeting of the Radiological Society of North America (RSNA) shows that even patients who've had imaging exams in the past know little about the profession.

Peter D. Miller, M.D.

Researchers said the study findings highlight an opportunity for radiologists to educate the public about their role in healthcare.

"We know from previous studies that about half of the general public doesn't even know that radiologists are physicians," said Peter D. Miller, M.D., radiology resident at the Indiana University School of Medicine in Indianapolis. "In our study, only 53.5 percent of patients who had undergone computed tomography (CT) knew that radiologists were physicians."

The roots of the new study trace back to a speech by the late Gary Glazer, M.D., former chair of the Department of Radiology at Stanford University School of Medicine in Stanford, Calif., and Gold Medal recipient at the 2009 RSNA annual meeting.

"When we saw him speak at RSNA, it inspired us to start our own study at Indiana University School of Medicine," Dr. Miller said.

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Dr. Miller and colleagues focused on patients undergoing outpatient CT at the university hospital. During a four-month period, they asked adult patients if they would be willing to meet with a radiologist and complete two brief surveys concerning radiologists and their role in healthcare. Of the 307 patients surveyed, almost half had at least a college education or higher.

Richard B. Gunderman, M.D., Ph.D.

Slightly more than 64 percent of respondents reported that they had little or no idea what radiologists do. Only 35.8 percent reported having much understanding, despite the fact that almost 83 percent replied that is was important or very important to know who interprets their imaging exams. Overall experience was reported as very positive by 70 percent of those who met a radiologist versus 53 percent of those who did not meet a radiologist.

"We need to better understand what patients want to know about radiologists in order to improve service and patient care," Dr. Miller said. "In my experience, people who've had the opportunity to interact with radiologists appreciated the chance to talk with them and get their thoughts on the imaging results."

Slightly more than 83 percent of respondents said that they were interested or very interested in receiving a copy of their radiology report. Only 2.7 percent were not interested. More than 62 percent expressed interest in having access to a website with their radiologists' biographies and pictures.

"Many patients would like to know more about the role of radiologists in their healthcare," said the study's senior author, Richard B. Gunderman, M.D., Ph.D., professor and vice chair of radiology at Indiana University. "These findings present an important educational opportunity for radiology practices."

Print and electronic materials, advertising and social media are among the ways that some institutions and organizations have worked to increase awareness of the profession. Changing the infrastructure and work process of radiology departments is another promising avenue to facilitate more patient interaction with the radiologists interpreting their imaging exams.

RSNA 2012 will host the kickoff of "Radiology Cares: the art of patient-centered practice." The RSNA-led, physician-directed initiative was developed to promote:

- Alignment of radiology practice with patients' needs and best interests.
- Optimal patient experience throughout the continuum of their radiologic care.
- Effective communications with patients and other healthcare providers, thus empowering patients to make informed decisions regarding their medical care.

Radiologists attending RSNA 2012 are encouraged to take the Radiology Cares pledge onsite at the meeting.

Coauthors of the research by Drs. Miller and Gunderman are Justin J. Lightburn, M.D., and David Miller, B.S., M.S.

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RSNA is an association of more than 50,000 radiologists, radiation oncologists, medical physicists and related scientists promoting excellence in patient care and health care delivery through education, research and technologic innovation. The Society is based in Oak Brook, Ill. (*RSNA.org*)

Editor's note: The data in these releases may differ from those in the published abstract and those actually presented at the meeting, as researchers continue to update their data right up until the meeting. To ensure you are using the most up-to-date information, please call the RSNA Newsroom at 1-312-949-3233.

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