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Longer Than Ever Radiology Waiting Lists Hurt More Patients

Ottawa has worst MRI wait list in Ontario

TORONTO – A new report issued today by the Ontario Association of Radiologists (OAR) shows Ontario patients are waiting longer than ever for all kinds of radiology procedures, and especially critical CT and MRI scans. Some communities have radiology waiting lists that have grown so long that patients are no longer being scheduled for appointments. There is no consistency in the wait times for the same diagnostic exam in different Ontario communities, which deny patients a common level of care and undermine confidence in the public funded system.

The Wait Goes On: *Ontario's Radiology Waiting List Crisis Update 2004* found that access to radiology waiting lists has deteriorated over the past year and the majority of patients waiting for diagnostic services including MRI scans, CT scans and ultrasound examinations are waiting much longer than is deemed medically appropriate.

The report reviewed waiting lists for seven critical radiology examinations in more than 50 communities, urban and rural, throughout Ontario. The radiology examinations reviewed included: barium enema x-ray, ultrasound, bone mineral densitometry, mammography, cardiac nuclear medicine, CT scans and MRI scans. The review surveyed radiologists who are the front-line providers of these services.

The results are alarming, as the situation has continued to generally decline since the OAR first reported on the situation in 2002. Due to the extremely long wait times to obtain access to CT and MRI scans, some hospitals are no longer adding patients to already overextended waiting lists due to the futility in offering those services in a medically appropriate time frame.

In Ottawa, patient requisitions are no longer being added to the waiting list leaving over ten thousand (10,000) patients not knowing how many months it will take to get access to an MRI for a diagnosis. There are approximately another 9,000 Ottawa patients with appointments on a nine (9) month waiting list.

Ottawa and Cornwall have the longest waits for MRI in Ontario. Some patients in those cities wait up to 72 weeks for an MRI scan.

"Patients in our Nation's capital are being treated like second class citizens," said Dr. Giuseppe Tarulli, OAR president. "Ottawa is so underserved in terms of access to MRI equipment that patients are now being put in limbo as they wait to be added to a waiting list. It is outrageous."

The report also found that:

- Radiology waiting lists in Ontario have grown in the past year
- 94% of patients who need an MRI are waiting longer than is medically appropriate

- 89% of patients who need a CT are waiting longer than is medically appropriate
- 72% of patients waiting for an ultrasound are waiting longer than is medically appropriate
- 90% of radiologists said in the last year there has been **little or no progress** in reducing radiology waiting lists
- 94% of radiologists said waiting lists **will increase** (75%) or **stay the same** (19%) in the next year
- Wide fluctuations in waiting lists across Ontario for the same radiology examination

“Today’s inadequate access to radiology exams in Ontario has bottlenecked the entire health care system due to the lack of leadership to approve many more CT and MRI scanners and to reverse the devastating lack of radiology operating funding,” said Dr. Mark Prieditis, OAR Executive Vice-President. “Without an early radiology diagnosis, patients are penalized in their efforts to get a timely referral to another medical specialist, surgery, therapy, and other treatments for a broad range of diseases including all cancers, cardiac disease, osteoporosis, and neurological conditions.”

The report also includes 16 recommendations to improve the situation and to reduce waiting lists so that patients can access these services within a more medically acceptable time frame.

“The greatest reason for CT and MRI waiting lists is the failure to approve enough scanners to provide diagnostic services and that can be fixed with immediate government action and consultation with radiologist experts. Without that leadership, our hands are tied,” said Dr. Tarulli.

The Ontario Association of Radiologists is a non-profit professional organization representing 700 radiology physicians who provide medical imaging services in both hospitals and community-based clinics across the province.

The full-report can be found on the homepage of the OAR website at www.oar.info.

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