Efficiency vs. Empathy

How the Rapid Advancement and Overuse of Modern Radiology Impacts Patient Care

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Introduction

- Modern medical imaging has revolutionized healthcare and has improved diagnostic efficacy and accessibility
- Rapid advancements and increased volume that requires higher productivity and speed has raised concerns about patient interaction, safety, and over-utilization
- Patients often experience nervousness and anxiety, especially when they are unfamiliar and uninformed about what is happening, which makes communication so important.

Advancements in Radiology

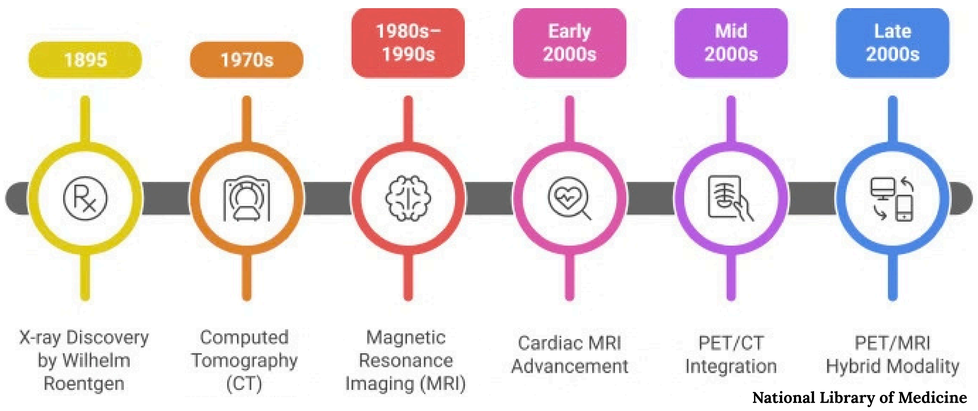
- Medical imaging has evolved significantly throughout the past several decades
- Film based systems have mostly been replaces with digital. This has improved image production time, image quality, and diagnostic accuracy by eliminating many steps to get to the final image.
- EMR and PACS have streamlined technologists workflow and helps with productivity and communication between other healthcare professionals.
- These advancements have improved diagnostic capabilities while also requiring increased exam volume and workload for the technologists.

Increased Exam Volume

- Advanced imaging services, such as CT and MRI, have contributed to the rapid growth of medical imaging providing easy access to fast results leading to higher exam volumes in turn creating greater workload demands for technologists.
- Over-utilization of imaging is the use of imaging to perform exams that are not clinically necessary or will not improve patient outcomes.
- Providers have become over reliant on imaging services and tend to use imaging as a routine process to diagnose rather than a thorough clinical evaluation first.

The Patient Experience

- The rapid increase in workload raises concerns about the decline in meaningful patient interactions during imaging exams.
- Patient safety and communication are extremely important. High workload demands put pressure on the technologists to get more done in less time.
- No matter the age or condition of the patient, it is important to take a little extra time to communicate, comfort, and connect with each patient.
- Advancements in medical imaging should enhance patient care and their outcomes, not overshadow the patient experience.



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According to the American Journal of Medicine, about 20-50% of high-tech imaging exams may be of no clinical value to the patient

Patient Safety

- Radiologic technologists have an ethical responsibility to prioritize and advocate for patient safety, especially when dealing with harmful radiation.
- ALARA (as low as reasonably achievable) is a core principle to minimize radiation exposure by presenting three cardinal rules: time, distance, and shielding.
- Balancing efficiency and empathy ensure the patient receives care that is clinically necessary and respectful to their needs.

Conclusion

- Technological advancements have improved the efficiency and diagnostics capabilities of modern imaging.
- Due to the advancements, the increase in exams puts pressure on speed, productivity, and more availability which leads to overuse and reduced meaningful patient interactions.
- Radiologic Technologists can maintain patient-centered care by balancing efficiency with empathy, communication, and compassion to enhance the overall patient experience.

References

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