

Direct patient access to imaging test results could result in increased patient anxiety and physician overload

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Providing patients with direct access to their imaging test results could improve patient satisfaction and clinical outcomes. However, physicians are concerned that it could lead to increased patient anxiety and unrealistic demands on physician time, according to a study in the April issue of the *Journal of the American College of Radiology*.

"[Patients](#) do not receive as much medical information as they want," said Annette J. Johnson, MD, MS, lead author of the study. "Given the manner in which test results are typically shared with patients (e.g., verbally, briefly, and days or weeks later), this dissatisfaction with information access is not surprising," said Johnson.

The study, performed at the Wake Forest University School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, NC, looked at the possibility of radiologists using the Internet to communicate rapid online imaging results directly to patients. Eight radiologists and seven referring physicians participated in the study, which was made up of two focus groups.

Radiologists and referring physicians agreed that there are some potential benefits of an online system for patient access including increased [patient satisfaction](#) and the ability to offer patients hyperlinks to high quality educational material. However with regard to potential disadvantages, radiologists and referring physicians offered several.

"The greatest concern revolved around patients' ability to understand written reports. Participants predicted that patients, who may not fully comprehend the report's content or place its meaning into proper context, would experience increased anxiety if they did not have prompt access to a physician to assist them in understanding the results and implications. They also thought that referring physicians and radiologists might experience a dramatically increased number of telephone calls from patients for clarification of report contents — an increase that they could not realistically accommodate," said Johnson. Referring physicians were concerned that immediate patient access to reports would limit physicians' opportunity to adequately prepare for patient's consultative requests, possibly negatively affecting the physician's opportunity to guide management decisions appropriately.

"While physicians participating in this study generally agreed that patients should take more responsibility for their own health care and be better informed, and that the system for reporting needs to be improved, only a small minority of radiologists and referring physicians supported patients being offered unlimited direct access to radiology [test results](#)," she said.

More information: www.jacr.org

Provided by American College of Radiology

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