

# Electronic consultations between primary providers and radiologists improve patient care

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**PCP:** 33yo woman seen at the ER re: pneumonia with incidental finding on chest X-ray of an azygous fissure. She was not noted to have pneumonia. Please confirm this is a benign variant, and no f/u needed re: azygous fissure. Thank you

**Radiologist:** Azygos fissure with azygos lobe is an anatomic variant seen in 1 to 2% of chest radiographs. It has no clinical significance and no need for imaging follow up.

Example of interactions between primary care physician (PCP) and radiologist illustrate use of software. yo = year-old, ER = emergency room, f/u = follow-up.  
Credit: American Roentgen Ray Society (ARRS), *American Journal of Roentgenology* (AJR)

According to ARRS' *American Journal of Roentgenology* (AJR), electronic consultation not only offered primary care providers (PCPs) easy access to expert opinions by radiologists, it promoted collaboration between physicians that improved patient care, including avoiding unnecessary imaging tests.

"The eConsult (Champlain BASE) electronic [consultation](#) platform was developed to provide a secure method for PCPs to ask a specialist patient-specific questions supported by relevant clinical information,"

explained first author Daniel Walker at the University of Ottawa.

Of the 20,678 eConsults completed through the service to all participating specialists from September 2012 to January 2017, 307 (1.48%) were sent to radiologists—classified by subspecialty (neuroradiology, thoracic, abdominal, musculoskeletal, or pediatric radiology), question type (workup, surveillance, education, specialist referral query, discharge, or other), anatomy, and pathology.

To evaluate timeliness, value, and impact on [patient care](#), Walker and team had PCPs complete feedback surveys after each consultation.

Q1. Which of the following best describes the outcome of this eConsult for your patient:

1. I was able to confirm a course of action that I originally had in mind
2. I got good advice for a new or additional course of action
3. I did not find the response very helpful
4. None of the above (please comment)

Q2. As a result of this eConsult, would you say that:

1. Referral was originally contemplated but now avoided at this stage
2. Referral was originally contemplated and is still needed – this eConsult likely leads to a more effective visit
3. Referral was not originally contemplated and is still not needed – this eConsult provided useful feedback/information
4. Referral was not originally contemplated, but eConsult process resulted in referral being initiated
5. There was no particular benefit to using eConsult in this case
6. Other (please comment)

Q3. Please rate the overall value of the eConsult service in this case for your patient:

Minimal 1 2 3 4 5 Excellent

Q4. Please rate the overall value of the eConsult service in this case for you as a primary care provider:

Minimal 1 2 3 4 5 Excellent

Q5. We would value any additional feedback you provide

Text of survey administered to study participants. Q = question. Credit: American Roentgen Ray Society (ARRS), American Journal of Roentgenology (AJR)

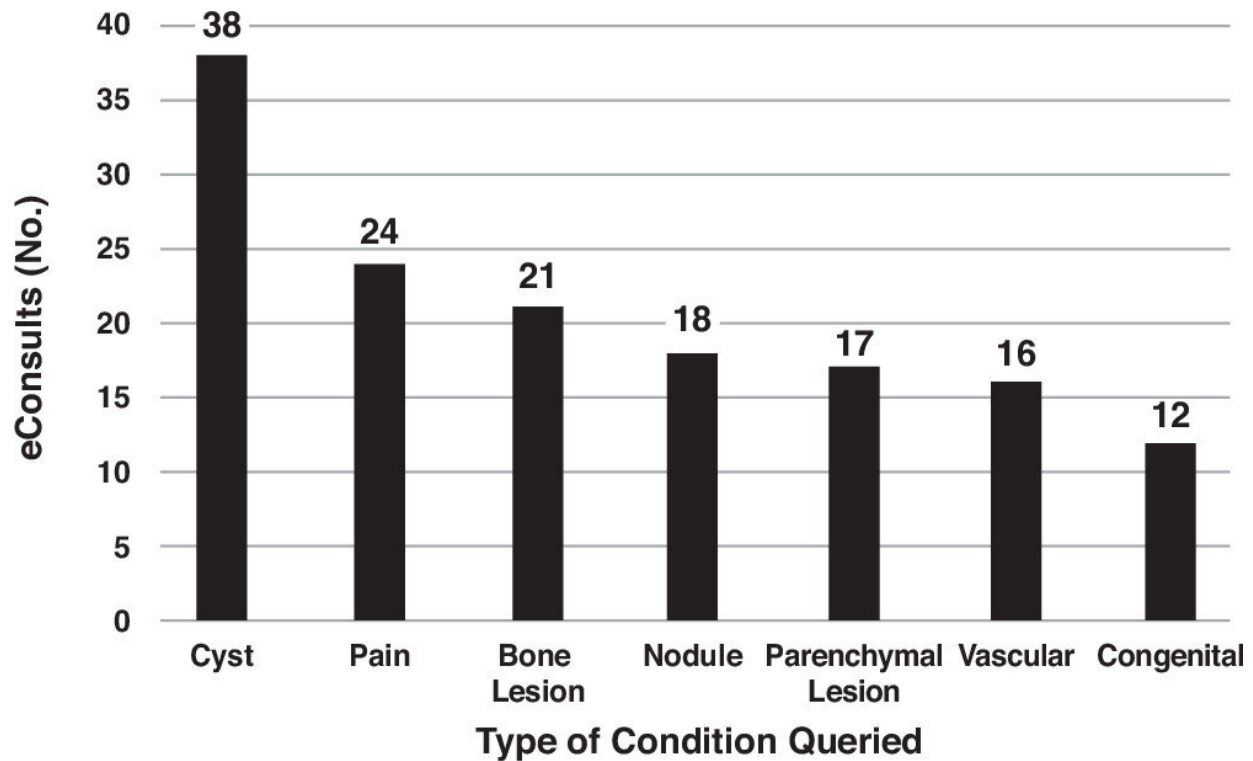
The Canadian researchers excluded five eConsults from their analysis due to insufficient clinical information, so of the 302 total consultations they reviewed, the subspecialties broke down accordingly:

- abdominal (94/302 [31%]),
- neuroradiology (74/302 [25%]),
- musculoskeletal (61/302 [20%]),
- thoracic (56/302 [19%]),
- pediatric (17/302 [6%]).

With regard to anatomic subclassification, eConsults most often pertained to the brain (47/302 [16%]), lungs (30/302 [10%]), spine (29/302 [10%]), and liver (27/302 [9%]).

Further subclassification revealed the most common conditions were cystic lesions (38/302 [13%]), pain (24/302 [8%]), bone lesions (21/302 [7%]), and nodules (18/302 [6%]).

The majority of consultations pertained to patient workup (112/302 [37%]), surveillance of imaging findings (95/302 [31%]), and provider education (48/302 [16%]).



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Patient management was altered in 167 cases (55%), and unnecessary testing was avoided in 84 cases (28%). Meanwhile, in 227 cases (75%), PCPs rated the perceived value of the eConsult platform as "excellent."

"It may be helpful for radiologists to alter their reporting style to include clear follow-up guidelines for incidental findings," Walker et al. concluded, adding that PCPs may also benefit from continuing medical education on cystic lesion imaging, as well as imaging's role in the

workup of patient pain.

**More information:** Daniel Walker et al, Electronic Consultation Between Primary Care Providers and Radiologists, *American Journal of Roentgenology* (2020). [DOI: 10.2214/AJR.19.22270](https://doi.org/10.2214/AJR.19.22270)

Provided by American Roentgen Ray Society

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