

Dear ACR Member:

As you may know, the American College of Radiology has launched the “The Face of Radiology” branding campaign to inform patients of exactly what radiologists do and why our expertise and training are vital elements of patient care.

The College recently conducted focus groups and in-depth interviews with individuals selected to be an accurate cross-section of Americans in Miami (area with highest per capita use of medical imaging), Burlington, Vt. (among the areas with the lowest per capita use of medical imaging), and Washington, D.C. These focus groups, interviews and a subsequent, national phone survey revealed that many people:

- Do not consider radiologists doctors
- Do not know that radiologists must graduate from medical school
- Deem radiologists to be “passionless”
- Believe that being a radiologist does not require a college education

It is no coincidence that these public perceptions have coincided with an exponential rise in imaging performed by other medical specialties and efforts by government and private payers to cut reimbursement for imaging services. From 1998–2005, the nonradiologists’ share of in-office MRI and CT doubled and tripled respectively. Nonradiologists received more than double the amount of Medicare dollars paid to radiologists for in-office imaging during that span — nearly \$4 billion. The result is that nearly three-quarters of all non-hospital imaging is now performed by nonradiologist providers.

The self-referrers are able to prosper largely because patients do not know that they have a choice. Most have never seen a radiologist. The results of the imaging exam they received are almost always explained to them by their referring physician. Their experience with radiology is largely limited to a brief conversation with a technologist who tells them that their doctor will give them the results of their scans.

If we, as radiologists do not do something to make our contributions (or at least our presence) known to patients, there is no reason to believe that radiologists will overcome our lost market share to other providers, that patients will receive consistent care from qualified providers; or that the ACR will not continually have to counter ill-conceived and implemented government and private payer efforts to slow imaging growth. After all, Capitol Hill staff and even our elected officials are someone’s patients. Their perceptions of how health care should be carried out (and funded) are, at least to a point, determined by their own interactions with health care providers.

One thing that has become crystal clear is that patient perception regarding this issue is primarily driven by personal experience. No amount of advertising alone can replace what patients experience at imaging facilities nationwide. We have to act on the personal level. We have to reach out to our patients.

There are approximately 33,000 radiologists nationwide. If every radiologist can say hello to five patients per day, and explain our role in their care, the result would be more than 150,000 patients every day whose experiences would include the knowledge that not only are radiologist doctors, but they are “their” doctors. If you do the math, this is about 34 million “teachable moments” every year.

As part of the “Face of Radiology” campaign, the College has created materials to help us bridge the physician-patient gap. These materials, which will be available to all ACR members, include the following tools:

- A DVD titled, “My Radiologist,” which explains the education, training, and role of radiologists
- The “My Radiologist” patient education brochure
- PowerPoint presentations for your use in presenting at local functions
- Campaign advertisements (that you are free to customize)
- Visuals and other tools for use in your office waiting room

To generate mass awareness of the contributions that radiologists make to patient care, the College is integrating traditional marketing techniques with emerging ones, such as social media outlets YouTube and Facebook. The ACR will be implementing a strong media relations effort as part of this campaign as well. However, we as radiologists are going to have to hold up our end of the bargain. Please help the ACR help us by stepping out of the reading room and into our patients’ experiences. The very future of our specialty may depend on it.

Sincerely,



Harvey L. Neiman, M.D., FACR  
Executive Director  
American College of Radiology