

February 28, 2020

Dr. Alayne Farries
Chair, Council of Zonal Leaders
Alberta Medical Association
201-12315 Stony Plain Rd NW
EDMONTON AB T5N 3Y8

Dear Dr. Farries:

Re: Wait-times for publically funded MRI/CT exams

Thank you for letter dated February 11, 2020 regarding the above subject.

We recognize that access for CT and MR Imaging have become a challenge for clinicians and patients, and understand the need for timely access to these imaging modalities in order to diagnose patients with disease such as cancer. The existing wait-times indeed pose challenges for our Radiologists and for the staff in Diagnostic Imaging. They do their best to prioritize and schedule imaging appointments based on clinical prioritization guidelines and clinical information provided at the time of referral.

The current challenges we face are as a result of a one-time budget uplift that was specific to improve the CT and MR wait-times in the 2018/19 fiscal year. The return to our 18/19 budget for the 19/20 fiscal year, along with the growth in CT and MR over the last year (5% and 3% respectively) have increased our wait-times considerably.

Managing wait-times is a challenge that will require an integrative approach. We are communicating with clinicians in Alberta who can help with the current challenges we face by:

- Following Choosing Wisely Canada guidelines to enhance appropriateness of CT and MR Imaging requests <https://choosingwiselycanada.org/recommendations/>.
- Providing essential clinical detail when referring a patient for imaging to allow for efficient triage and prioritization according to clinical prioritization guidelines.
- Speaking with a Radiologist if an imaging appointment does not meet emergent clinical need.
- Refraining from referring patients to the Emergency Departments for the sole purpose of facilitating imaging. This in turn increases system costs and wait-times for Emergency Department visits.

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Diagnostic Imaging leaders in concert with Alberta Health are working on a comprehensive DI Action Plan to address increasing wait-times in CT and MR and have already implemented many initiatives that are helping manage the current situation. Ernst & Young recently completed a review requested by the Government of Alberta, and announced various recommendations that will help us achieve savings which can be directed towards reducing wait-times which we are examining. In the short term, we will be directing dedicated funding towards MRI and CT to help assist in reducing current wait-times, but will look for your support in addressing sustainability for diagnostics.

We continue to look for opportunities across the organization to reduce costs which can be redirected to reducing CT and MR imaging wait-times. Resolution of the challenges we face will indeed take time and a collaborative effort. We appreciate your patience and suggestions on how to improve access for our patients.

Sincerely,



Verna Yiu, MD, FRCPC
President and Chief Executive Officer

C: Honourable Tyler Shandro, Minister of Health
Lorna Rosen, Deputy Minister of Health
Mike Gormley, Executive Director, Alberta Medical Association