

Patient-Doctor Communication May Make Heart Imaging Safer

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Risks of radiation from heart imaging should be discussed with patients before the procedure, said American Heart Association

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(dailyRx News) As the value of medical imaging as a lifesaving tool has increased in recent years, so has patients' radiation exposure from these procedures. The American Heart Association (AHA) released a statement about heart imaging in an effort to reduce unneeded radiation exposure.

The authors of the statement said that safe imaging relied on three pillars: education, justification and optimization.

They also noted that nearly 40 percent of radiation exposure in patients came from heart imaging.

The authors wrote that doctors need to empower and inform patients about their heart imaging options. They said doctors should tell patients about

both the benefits and risks of the procedure, as well as why it's needed.

Heart imaging is a method doctors use to take an image of the heart or blood vessels to see problems like poor blood flow. Common heart imaging methods that expose patients to radiation are nuclear stress tests and CT scans of the heart.

Radiation can cause cancer in patients who are exposed to too much.

"In general, the radiation-related risk of any imaging test to an individual patient is very small and, when the test is clinically appropriate, the benefits of the test typically far outweigh any potential risks," said Reza Fazel, MD, one of the statement authors and a cardiologist at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, in a press release.

Still, the AHA authors stressed that doctors should use imaging on patients only when it is needed.

When imaging is needed, doctors should inform their patients about the procedure, tell them why it's needed and be sure the right amount of radiation is used, the authors wrote. The "right amount" is no more than is needed to provide a useful image. More than that can raise patients' risk for health effects from radiation.

In an interview with dailyRx News, Dr. Deepika Gopal, a clinical cardiologist with The Heart Group

and on the medical staff at The Heart Hospital Baylor Plano, explained the key approaches doctors use to enhance radiation safety in medical imaging.

First, Dr. Gopal explained, doctors should "educate patients so they understand the risks and benefits of the imaging procedure they are recommending." She also advised patients to make sure the imaging procedure is clinically necessary by discussing it with their physician. Lastly, the physician "should optimize the imaging procedure so radiation exposure is kept as low as reasonably achievable," Dr. Gopal said.

Dr. Fazel and colleagues wrote that doctors should also inform patients of other techniques that could also work without using radiation.

Other factors doctors should consider are costs, convenience, other risks and accuracy, the authors wrote.

The AHA statement was published online Sept. 29 in *Circulation*.

Some of the statement authors received research grants or served on boards for health care companies.