

Clinical imaging guidance

Guidelines for radiographers relating to clinical imaging requests from non-medically qualified professionals is aimed at ensuring that the message to all health professionals involved in clinical imaging referrals is clear and consistent.

For the osteopathic profession, this guidance offers a tool for negotiating access to local clinical imaging services. Many osteopaths have experienced difficulties when requesting clinical imaging tests. And obtaining results from radiology departments, whether NHS or private, is often an unnecessarily lengthy procedure.

The development of this guidance was a joint project, led by the Royal College of Nursing, and, as well as the GOsC, involved the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists, the General Chiropractic Council, NHS Alliance, Health Protection Agency and the Society and College of Radiographers. The guidance was circulated to all radiology departments.

Recent and ongoing changes to the way health care is delivered in the UK have resulted in a greater cross-section of the healthcare community becoming involved in diagnostic triage. Consequently, lack of understanding of other health professionals' training and competency in this field seemed to lead to the current inconsistencies in the clinical imaging referral process.

This issue received further attention following the introduction of the Ionising Radiation (Medical Exposure) Regulations, which put a requirement on all healthcare authorities/radiology departments to ensure that staff and referrers are adequately trained to administer and/or refer patients for tests involving ionising radiation, i.e. X-rays.

To address some of these advances – and resulting difficulties – the GOsC contributed to the development of these guidelines in the hope of achieving greater clarity and consistency in the process, and improved patient outcomes – safe, effective care and reduced waiting times.

These guidelines help to illustrate that, as primary contact practitioners, osteopaths are equipped with the knowledge and skills to make an informed clinical evaluation of a patient and to justify further diagnostic investigation. Requesting clinical imaging tests is within the osteopathic scope of practice – osteopaths receive sufficient training in this area at an undergraduate level, enabling them to take informed decisions about the need to refer patients for clinical imaging tests and giving them the skills to interpret results. Some osteopaths also go on to undertake postgraduate training in this field. It is, however, the professional responsibility of all osteopaths to ensure that their knowledge and skills remain up-to-date.