

The changing face of radiology

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Radiology has been the main medical beneficiary of the 20th century revolution in computers and electronic networks. Over the last half century almost each decade has witnessed the appearance of a brand new imaging device able to outperform much of the imaging technology that preceded it. This is exciting yet daunting to radiologists across the globe.

We will continue to ride the crest of this technological wave. Leaders and innovators in our field have adopted the latest advances in network technology to use for the management of electronic images within the health care enterprise. The increasing utilisation of imaging in the next 20 - 50 years will occur even in the absence of continued development of medical imaging technology; this growth is likely to be accompanied by improved technology and broadened applications of imaging to clinical situations.

The ever-improving technology of diagnostic imaging and information management has added value to teaching in other areas of medicine. Many lecturers in radiology and clinical medicine import clinical images into their presentation graphic packages to produce slides with greater visual impact. An increasing number of modern lecture facilities have digital projection facilities which obviate the use of slides. Access to images has become much easier for students, teachers and professionals in the medical fraternity.

Recent developments in radiological reporting, education, and publication have led to a need for radiological images in digital form for use on personal computers. Reports to referring physicians benefit from the inclusion of images in digital form through the worldwide web. Images are presented with better resolution, and storage has become much easier through the PACS system.

We need to keep up with the pace of growth and diversification in radiology. In the midst of dizzying advances in radiological technology, radiologists must ensure that our rapidly advanced applications actually save lives and add value to the work of our clinical colleagues. Therein lies our usefulness. Among our best opportunities is to demonstrate convincingly that the use of diagnostic imaging and image-guided therapy saves the health care system money.

One major challenge facing us is the introduction of these advanced technologies in our registrar training programmes and practices in the country. We have to contend with the provincial government to provide them in our academic hospitals. We believe that the field of radiology is better positioned than any other medical discipline to drive the digital revolution in health care and to benefit from the continued revolutionary advances in technology that have dominated our society over the past decades.

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Guest Editors