

Caring for British Columbians in the Wake of the Pandemic and Beyond: Timely Access to Medical Imaging

Radiologists are calling on *all* political parties to commit to the reduction of extensive wait times for life-saving medical imaging diagnostic and interventional procedures.

Vancouver, October 6, 2020 – Without a doubt, COVID-19 has emerged as the most dire health crisis of our time and continues to profoundly affect patient access to healthcare. While British Columbia has taken strong action toward managing and preventing further spread of COVID-19, radiologists remain deeply concerned for patients who are anxiously awaiting lifesaving medical imaging and interventional procedures delayed due to the pandemic.

Prior to the outbreak, it was estimated by the Conference Board of Canada that wait times for medical imaging in Canada far exceeded the acceptable 30-day standard for urgent exams of clinical importance.

Since the start of the pandemic, British Columbian radiology communities have responded in a strong, agile manner and continue to adapt to the changing environment. Initially, there was active participation in a provincial emergency committee to guide radiology departments through the early phase of the COVID response. This has been followed by active involvement in a National Task Force led by the Canadian Association of Radiologists (CAR) providing recommendations on building system capacity and resilience for the future of diagnostic imaging. Provincial radiology leaders have been instrumental in developing and implementing prioritization guidelines, standardizing imaging protocols and increasing hours of operation to maximize system efficiencies, whilst ensuring patient safety and maintaining high quality services.

“Patient access to medical imaging should be both a strategic priority and patient care imperative of any elected government”, states Dr. Simon Bicknell, President of the British Columbia Radiological Society. “Medical imaging serves as a gateway for patients whose physicians rely on the radiologist’s diagnostic report to make critical, timely treatment decisions”.

BC’s public will likely be aware of the Government’s recent investments in medical imaging, particularly to improve access to much needed MRI services. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted deficiencies in other areas of medical imaging, such as outdated CT scanners and X-ray equipment, needed to guide life-saving therapies as well as a lack of trained technologists. This requires a major investment to adequately address the wait time and access issue. An investment to the health of all British Columbians.

Unfortunately, we know that British Columbians are suffering unnecessarily today. Without a timely diagnosis, there will continue to be delays in treatment resulting in poorer patient outcomes. BC’s medical imaging system requires a capital investment of \$225M over 5 years to substantially address

wait times and infrastructure needs. In parallel, investment in health human resources, strong leadership and decisive actions are required from *all* parties on an immediate basis to effect this change.

“It is imperative that we have a robust capital and human resource investment plan in place to ensure that British Columbians receive the timely care they need with equitable access to medical imaging and life-saving interventional procedures today, and for years to come”, concluded Bicknell.

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