



Dr Ron Shnier, President of ADIA, discusses the changing face of Radiology

The traditional structure of radiology is changing. Political, market and clinical forces are impacting on the future of our profession. All the evidence suggests a future under siege from external forces (globalization, turf wars, increasing demand for imaging, inadequate funding, rising costs) and internal pressures to become more efficient and technologically proficient.

At a meeting I attended recently in connection with the introduction of Medicare rebates for CT coronary angiograms (CTCA), professional representatives were advised that the current government does not support the traditional silos of service provision in the health workforce and is seeking optimal use the workforce. It is the government's view that a practitioner who has the skill and competence to provide CTCA should not be precluded by restrictions in the Medical Benefits Schedule (MBS) from providing that service.

The message from the government was clear: there will be no "turf war" between radiologists and cardiologists over CTCA and the focus has been shifted to qualifications rather than specialty.

The government's policy is consistent with the clear trend towards patient-centred delivery of health care services through greater integration of health care services and a multi-disciplinary approach to patient management.

This trend reflects greater consumerism in health care and is likely to continue. It has the potential to significantly affect the current radiology service delivery model.

One of the traditional strengths of radiology as a specialty has been the integration of a comprehensive range of imaging services within a radiology department or practice. This model is now under threat not only from the trend to patient-centred care but also from trends in digitization and globalization.

The field of Radiology has expanded dramatically in recent years, as has its sophistication. This has been matched by increasing complexity in medical practice and increasing reliance on imaging to manage patients. The need for subspecialty knowledge and care is increasing.

The future of radiology will depend on how well it delivers expert imaging services to clinicians across the broad medical spectrum.

We are under pressure to redefine the radiology service delivery system and the way we practice radiology.

Greater collaboration with other medical specialties will be the key to ensuring the continuation of radiology's role in the changing world of medicine.

Collaboration will also be important as the government tries to shift the focus of medicine from managing illness to preventing illness.

Changing the practice paradigm will not be easy. In the long term I do not think we can afford not to interact more directly patients and their clinical management team and to better understand the clinical context of our examinations and procedures.

Diagnostic radiology's value is the provision of information to support clinical and treatment decisions

based on imaging data. Radiologists are highly trained medical specialists who have expertise to bring to the clinical decision making process across all disciplines. Interventional radiologists of course are well advanced along this track and more often than not are valued as an integral part of the patient's "medical team".

For imaging data to be useful for clinical decision making and patient management today requires the imaging data to be provided in a broad array of imaging formats and to be combined with an increasingly broad range of knowledge that sometimes extends beyond the radiologist's traditional clinical knowledge base.

In order to make our interpretations more relevant to referring clinicians, some of whom are already competent to provide sub-specialty imaging services, we may need to take on a greater responsibility for managing the entire information process as well as being part of the management team's consultative process rather than just a pure imaging service provider. Radiologists are well placed to do this. Our information also needs to be fast, accurate, accessible, relevant and timely and this includes after hours. We have already invested heavily in the digital technologies to enable us to do this.

Better collaboration with other specialties will provide Radiologists with an opportunity to build their sub-specialty and broader knowledge bases which will enable them to maintain their relevance and add value in the changing medical world.