

TIP SHEET FOR ORDERING ADVANCED IMAGING STUDIES

Spine MRI, CT

- MRI is almost always preferred over CT scan; if ordering CT, CLEARLY document why MRI is not appropriate.
- In cases of back pain without “red flags”, six weeks of multi-modality conservative therapy (without significant symptom improvement) must be completed before an imaging study can be approved.
- Provide clear documentation of all elements of conservative therapy, including details of the physical therapy, home exercise program, or chiropractic care.
- Neurological deficits must be documented by a thorough neurological physical examination in the clinical notes.

Brain MRI, CT

- MRI is almost always preferred over CT scan; if ordering CT, CLEARLY document why MRI is not appropriate.
- Chronic headache (including chronic migraine) is an indication for advanced imaging ONLY if the headaches are increasing in frequency or have changed in severity or new neurological deficits are present.

Abdomen and Abdomen Pelvis CT

- Abdomen and Abdomen/Pelvis CTs deliver a high radiation dose. With and without contrast delivers double the dose. Studies should be ordered sequentially if needed, not concurrently as the second study is rarely required.
- Alternative studies, such as ultrasound, are frequently indicated prior to CTs and must be documented in the clinical information accompanying the imaging request.
- Laboratory work that will confirm or rule out inflammatory conditions such as appendicitis should be completed and documented in the clinical record before the CT request is made.

Extremity (Knee, Shoulder) MRI

- An examination of the joint involved with documentation of findings consistent with the suspected diagnosis must be submitted as part clinical information when requesting an MRI.
- In cases of persistent pain or suspected fracture, a plain x-ray should be documented in submitted clinical information before MRI is ordered.
- Four weeks of conservative therapy without significant pain relief should be documented in submitted clinical information before MRI is ordered for chronic/persistent pain.

Chest CT

- A Chest CTA, not a Chest CT, is the appropriate study to evaluate for pulmonary embolism
- A Chest CTA is NOT indicated in a patient at low clinical risk for pulmonary embolism

Sinus CT

- The primary use of sinus CT scans is to aid in management of chronic sinusitis. Thus, sinus CT for sinusitis is appropriate ONLY after completion of at least four weeks of medical therapy without significant improvement in symptoms.
- Brain/Sinus CT combination studies are rarely indicated since Brain CTs almost always provide adequate views of the sinuses.