

Health Awareness

Medical Imaging Safety Study Shows Patients Need More Information

(NAPSA)—According to The New England Journal of Medicine, medical imaging technology, such as MRI, is one of 11 developments that changed the face of clinical medicine in the last millennium. MRIs play a critical role in early disease detection, diagnosis and treatment. Nevertheless, imaging is most likely to help the very people for whom it can be dangerous.

Here's the problem: MRIs are particularly effective at diagnosing cancer, Alzheimer's, heart or artery conditions, muscle, bone and back pain—all of which are prevalent among older adults. Unfortunately, many older adults also have implantable devices such as pacemakers, defibrillators or stimulators, which can make receiving an MRI risky.

After the age of 65, a person's chance of needing medical imaging doubles, and between 50 and 75 percent of patients with electronic implantable devices will likely need medical imaging over their device's lifetime. More than 60 million noninvasive, diagnostic MRI procedures are performed worldwide each year. At the same time, there are approximately 1.5 million people in the United States who have pacemakers.

The National Council on Aging (NCOA), a nonprofit service and advocacy organization, recently released the results of a survey by Penn Schoen Berland of older adults, caregivers and health care providers. The survey, funded by a grant from Medtronic, found that communication about the safety of medical imaging for patients with these devices is often inadequate, though both pacemaker and MRI manufacturers instruct physicians not to expose patients with pacemakers to MRI scans.



Ninety-eight percent of doctors support more education for their patients about medical imaging and electronic implantable devices.

More than 90 percent of physicians agree that an MRI may be risky for patients with certain electronic implantable devices, such as pacemakers, and few physicians will order MRIs for these patients.

The survey found, however, that nearly a third of patients and more than half of caregivers did not recall being informed that they might not be eligible for some forms of medical imaging at the time the device was implanted. The survey also found that three in 10 electronic-implantable-device patients have had an MRI despite the risks and, of this group, nearly 20 percent reported experiencing problems with their device afterward.

To help, NCOA, a nonprofit service and advocacy organization, is hosting community events where experts discuss the survey and provide information about medical imaging safety, particularly for patients with electronic implantable devices.

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For more information, you can call (202) 479-1200 or visit www.ncoa.org.