

MEDIA RELEASE

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The high cost of inappropriate use of CT scans

Overuse of computerised tomography (CT) scans is placing patients at unnecessary risk of cancer, writes Associate Professor Graham Simpson, Director of Thoracic Medicine at Cairns Base Hospital, in the latest edition of *Australian Prescriber*.

Professor Simpson says there needs to be greater understanding of the indications for CT scanning of the chest.

“There is evidence that the investigation is inappropriately used, causing unnecessary expense and risking adverse events,” Professor Simpson writes.

“Since its development, CT scanning has revolutionised medical imaging, paving the way for techniques such as magnetic resonance imaging and positron emission tomography. It is, however, a relatively expensive investigation, costing almost ten times as much as a chest x-ray.”

He also suggests health professionals underestimate the risk of malignant disease due to radiation exposure.

“In Australia CT scans probably account for 65% of the population's exposure to medical radiation. Increased radiation is associated with an increased risk of cancer, so CT scans should be used sparingly.”

Professor Simpson says it is important that CT scans are not ordered when only a chest x-ray is needed.

“Clearly, chest CT scans need to be ordered with a careful analysis of the risk-benefit ratio,” he concludes.

To read the full article, which includes guidelines for ordering thoracic CT scans, visit www.australianprescriber.com.

Media enquiries to Katie Butt, NPS Media Adviser, 0419 618 365 or kbutt@nps.org.au

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