

## Case Study: Just a Call Away



*Radiologists give referring providers their direct phone numbers, increasing their role as partners in care.*

By Jenny Jones

### Key Takeaways:

- Radiologists in North Carolina developed a phone-based program to improve communication with referring providers.
- The radiologists send their schedules, direct extensions, and cell phone numbers to referrers every week.
- The program improves communication between radiologists and referring providers, enhancing patient care.

The radiologists at Lumberton Radiology Consultants in Lumberton, N.C., thought they had a good system in place for communicating with referring providers: A clinician would call with a question about a study, the radiology group's clerical staff would take a message, and the appropriate radiologist would return the call as soon as possible.

But the system drew constant complaints from referring physicians. Rather than leaving a message and waiting for a radiologist to return their call, a process that sometimes delayed patient care, referring providers wanted to speak directly with a radiologist who could immediately answer their questions.

"We were filtering their requests through our clerical staff, thinking it would be more efficient if we called them in between cases," says James E. S. Parker, MD, assistant professor at Campbell University School of Osteopathic Medicine and chief executive officer of Lumberton Radiology Consultants. "But it really wasn't effective, and it infuriated a lot of providers. So we decided to make a decisive change."

### Resolution

The radiologists met with several referring providers to discuss possible solutions to the issue. After considering a text-based application that was ultimately deemed too cumbersome, the radiologists established a simple phone-based program that allows referrers to call them directly any day of the week. Here's how the program works:

- The radiology group uses the online marketing service [Mailchimp](#) to send an [email](#) to referring providers every Monday morning, outlining the radiologists' schedules for the week.
- It details which radiologists are working which days, the four-digit extension at which each radiologist can be reached, along with their cell phone numbers — just in case.

When the radiologists launched the program two years ago, they promoted it during departmental and committee meetings and through announcements



James E. S. Parker, MD, assistant professor at Campbell University School of Osteopathic Medicine and chief executive officer of Lumberton Radiology Consultants, helped launch a program that ensures the group's referring physicians have each radiologist's appropriate contact information for the week.

at the medical staff office. Today, they continue to add any referring physicians who are interested in the weekly email, which currently goes out to about 170 providers.

"If somebody calls our front desk who isn't already receiving our email, we'll offer to add them to our contact list and say, 'The next time you call us, it will be easier, because you'll know exactly where all of the radiologists are, and you can consult with them directly,'" Parker explains.

### Results

The radiologists initially worried that the calls might disrupt their workflow, but that hasn't been the case. "I think most of our radiologists actually find it satisfying to resolve these issues quickly over the phone and help the providers out there," says Parker, adding that the group receives about six calls a day.

Troy M. Sterk, DO, chairman of the department of medicine and hospitalist at Southeastern Regional Medical Center, who is also an ED provider with the Veterans Administration, says the program has greatly improved communication among ordering physicians and radiologists, and has, in turn, enhanced patient care. "Over the last 10 to 20 years, we've become very fragmented in medicine, but with programs like this

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connecting all of the services, we get a better overall evaluation of the patient and avoid unnecessary delays in care," he says.

What's more, the program has helped the radiologists integrate more closely into the patient care team. "It's dramatically improved the reputation of the radiologists for being helpful and collegial with our medical staff, which pays big dividends when you're in a complex health care system," Parker says.

### Next Steps

- Meet with referring providers to understand communication pain points.
- Send your radiologists' schedules and direct contact information to referrers in a weekly email.
- Add referring providers to the email along the way.

### Join the Discussion

Want to join the discussion about how radiologists can streamline communication with referring providers? Let us know your thoughts on Twitter at #imaging3.

Have a case study idea you'd like to share with the radiology community? Please submit your idea to <http://bit.ly/CaseStudyForm>.



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