

Case Study: Calming Patients' Fears

A California radiology practice leverages RadiologyInfo.org to ease patients' anxiety about imaging.

By Michael Wereschagin

Key Takeaways:

- Desert Medical Imaging uses RadiologyInfo.org to explain upcoming procedures to patients, helping calm their fears.
- The site provides plain-language video and text descriptions of more than 240 radiological procedures in English and Spanish.
- When patients learn about their procedures before their scans, Desert Medical Imaging can provide more efficient care that often leads to improved outcomes.

Editor's note: This case study is part of a series called *Imaging 3.0 NOW*. Case studies in this series highlight straightforward initiatives that radiology practices can implement immediately to jumpstart or advance their Imaging 3.0 efforts.

For the patient in the exam room, the impending imaging study is anything but routine.

Maybe she's there because of a lump she hadn't felt before. Maybe he's wondering if he'll ever be able to climb the stairs to his bedroom again without pain. Whatever brings patients into Desert Medical Imaging in southern California's Coachella Valley, John F. Feller, MD, knows they already have plenty to worry about without being scared of the unfamiliar machines that will capture images of their bodies.

This fear is often born from simply not knowing what's going to happen during the exam. So Feller, medical director and founding partner of Desert Medical Imaging, and his team have committed to inviting incoming patients to visit RadiologyInfo.org, a website that describes more than 240 imaging procedures, before they walk through the door.

Desert Medical Imaging has done this in several ways: 1) The practice has become a RadiologyInfo.org affiliate, meaning the group links directly to RadiologyInfo.org from its website and RadiologyInfo.org links back to the practice's site; 2) the group's schedulers share RadiologyInfo.org with patients and encourages them to visit the site before they arrive for their appointments; and 3) the group shares RadiologyInfo.org both with referring physicians and with medical students who rotate through the practice and asks them to share it with their patients.

"RadiologyInfo.org is a wellspring of information that patients can visit any time of the day or night to prepare for their exams," Feller says of the site which attracts 17 million visitors a year. "When patients arrive for their exams well-informed, they have fewer questions and feel less anxious about their procedures, saving radiology practices like mine time and money while improving patient care."



John F. Feller, MD, medical director and founding partner of Desert Medical Imaging, leverages RadiologyInfo.org to help patients prepare for their imaging exams.

Demystifying Radiology

During the last two decades, teams of radiologists with the ACR and the Radiological Society of North America (RSNA) have partnered to develop RadiologyInfo.org. Together, they have populated the site with high-definition videos and plain-language explanations to help patients and families understand and prepare for their imaging exams.

Feller was on the committee that established the site 20 years ago. A survey at that time showed that 80 percent of people didn't know what radiologists did, let alone how they did it. "As imaging experts, we saw it as our responsibility to address this information gap," Feller says. "With people increasingly turning to the web for information, we decided to create a website that patients and families could access any time to learn more about radiology and get answers to questions about specific imaging exams."

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Arun Krishnaraj, MD, associate professor of radiology and medical imaging at the University of Virginia Health System and co-chair of the RadiologyInfo.org committee, says patients who visit the site have a better overall healthcare experience.

The site includes in-depth written descriptions of imaging studies that are searchable by disease type and patient population. It also includes "Ask Your Radiologist" videos, allowing patients and families to watch and listen as internationally recognized radiologists explain various exams and discuss radiation safety. Radiologists have vetted all of the content, which is available in both English and Spanish.

"The site features information that's accurate and jargon-free," Feller says. "It ensures that patients and families actually understand what they're seeing, hearing, and experiencing during the exam."

Empowering Patients

When patients have this information, they can engage more fully in their care, and that can have a real impact on outcomes, explains Arun Krishnaraj, MD, associate professor of radiology and medical imaging at the University of Virginia Health System and co-chair of the RadiologyInfo.org committee.

"We know anecdotally that patients who review RadiologyInfo.org often have a much better overall healthcare experience, and a much better grasp of radiology's role in their care," Krishnaraj says. "Every radiology practice should be thinking about how to provide this information to help patients prepare for and understand their radiology exams."

Desert Medical Imaging first linked to RadiologyInfo.org from its website in 1998, not long after the practice opened, Feller says. The practice's website includes descriptions of every exam it provides, and each of these explanations ends with a link to RadiologyInfo.org, urging patients to go there for more information. "We link to RadiologyInfo.org from multiple places on our website," Feller says. "We want to make it easy for our patients to access."

With this in mind, the practice's schedulers encourage patients to visit the site at the time that they schedule their exams. They even email patients links to the specific pages on RadiologyInfo.org that correspond with their upcoming studies, making the most pertinent information easy to find.

This approach reduces the amount of time staff have to spend explaining studies to patients. It also saves the group money because it doesn't have to create its own educational materials, Feller says. "We're not a large healthcare enterprise," he explains.

"With RadiologyInfo.org, everything patients need to know about and prepare for their exams is right there — all we have to do is tell them about it."

Engaging Referrers

In addition to linking to RadiologyInfo.org and encouraging patients to visit the site prior to their exams, Desert Medical Imaging's marketing team asks referring physicians to tell their patients about the site.

During visits and even cold calls to these offices, members of the Desert Medical Imaging marketing team talk to referring doctors about the informational benefit the site can provide to patients and the time benefit it provides to referring physicians.

"Referring clinicians, especially nowadays, are asked to do more and more with the patient in less and less time," Feller says. "If they end up spending most of their 15-minute clinic visit trying to explain the imaging test that they're ordering for the patient, then it doesn't leave them much time to talk to the patient about anything else."

Feller emphasizes this point to the medical students, interns, and residents who rotate through his practice every year from Desert Regional Medical Center and the University of California, Riverside. Many of the students who elect to do a radiology rotation at Desert Medical Imaging are pursuing careers in internal medicine, neurology, and family practice. Feller expects the students to familiarize themselves with RadiologyInfo.org in hopes that they will make a habit of incorporating it into their patient interactions from the start of their careers.

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"We get a lot of traction from the bottom up — from trainees, residents, and medical students who have grown up in the digital age," Feller says. "They know that when people need information, they turn to the internet first, and they recognize the importance of directing patients to information that has been vetted by the field's top professionals."

Adding Value

Sharing the high-quality information available on RadiologyInfo.org is an easy way for radiologists to enhance patient care. It's something any practice can do to help ease patients' fears, streamline care, and improve outcomes.

"More and more patients and their families are demanding this kind of information," Krishnaraj says. "With RadiologyInfo.org, radiology groups can meet these expectations at no cost and without a lot of effort. There's no reason not to share it. To me, it's a no-brainer."

Next steps:

- Direct patients to RadiologyInfo.org by having schedulers provide links to pages explaining their upcoming procedures.
- Explain to referring physicians how RadiologyInfo.org can help ease patient anxiety, save time, and provide better patient care.
- Introduce medical students, interns, and residents to the site, and get them in the habit of sharing its resources with patients.

Share Your Story

Have a case study idea you'd like to share with the radiology community? To submit your idea please [click here](#).



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