Radiologists Serve More CMS Beneficiaries Each Year Than Any Other Medical Specialty

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All too often, radiology is thought of as a non-patient facing profession.

It is critical not to lose sight of the integral role radiologists play in properly orchestrating patient care.

We aimed to assess the number of unique Medicare fee-for-service (FFS) beneficiaries radiologists on average serve yearly, in comparison with other specialists.
Materials and Methods

- Using Medicare Physician and Other Supplier Public Use Files, all physicians who provided services to Medicare FFS beneficiaries in 2013 were identified.

- Beneficiary counts per provider were extracted.

- All identifiable specialties were compared.
Of all 56 uniquely identifiable physician specialties providing services to Medicare FFS beneficiaries in 2013...

diagnostic radiologists served on average 3,150 ± 2,344 beneficiaries, more than any other specialty.
Results

* Top 5 subspecialties included:
  * Cardiologists \((2,511 \pm 2,000)\)
  * Cardiac electrophysiologists \((2,279 \pm 1,604)\)
  * Dermatologists \((2,164 \pm 2,023)\)
  * Interventional radiologists ranked 8th \((1,685 \pm 1,802)\)
  * Nuclear medicine physicians ranked 16th \((1,286 \pm 1,403)\)
Diagnostic radiology is, on average, the medical specialty with greatest number of patients served per physician.
Aggregated data set does not allow identification of how many interactions have involved communication or how many where it would not be possible.

(e.g., teleradiology for ICU radiography)

However, this study does demonstrate the tremendous opportunities and potential impact of developing mechanisms for radiologists to increase their direct communication with patients.
This single snapshot of imaging utilization demonstrates radiologists to be leaders in current patient care orchestration.

However, imaging utilization rates across all imaging modalities have continued to rise.

- For example, from 1994 - 2012, the overall utilization rate of cervical spine imaging for Medicare beneficiaries in the ED setting more than tripled. (Gan et al., 2016)
- An additional study found CT angiography usage (particularly in the ER) in the Medicare population increased markedly for 2001–2014 (Prabhakar et al., 2016)

Overall this has led to average growth in cross sectional imaging usage of 10% each year (ambulatory settings between 1995 and 2001) (Bhargavan et al., 2005)

Therefore, the future radiologist is projected to have an increasingly more prominent impact on the future delivery of patient care.
As the radiologist continues to play a more prominent role in patient care, it is critical to emphasize a value-based patient centered mentality.

In effect, not only will radiologists continue to touch more patient lives than any other medical specialty, the radiologist will also perhaps impact the practice of other subspecialties more than any other type of physician.

It is critical to practice and teach the concept of Imaging Wisely, and act as champions for Appropriate Use Criteria.

Buethe et al, 2016
In the new era of the 2015 Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act (MACRA) and the introduction of alternative payment models (APMs), we must now approach health care delivery creatively.

Physician-Focused Payment Models (PFPMs) allow the radiologist to demonstrate value added to patient care.

Knowing that the radiologist touches more lives than any other medical specialty, we should champion the PFPM model development and become leaders among the other subspecialties in redesigning the implementation of national patient care.

Rosenkrantz et al, 2017
Conclusions

- Diagnostic radiologists on average serve more unique Medicare beneficiaries each year than any other specialty. Opportunities to engage patients and better brand our specialty are enormous.
References


