New/Revised Diagnostic Imaging Standards from Joint Commission

The Joint Commission (Oakbrook Terrace, IL) announced on December 20 changes to its standards for accredited hospitals, critical access hospitals, and ambulatory health care organizations that provide diagnostic imaging services, including ambulatory organizations that have achieved Advanced Diagnostic Imaging certification. The changes will be effective July 1, 2014, with additional requirements to be phased in by 2015. The changes relate to either quality and safety issues that the commission believes are needed to more fully address the evolution of health care delivery practices or to expansion of current commission requirements. The revisions incorporate recommendations from diagnostic imaging experts, professional associations, and accredited organizations on topic areas that must be evaluated to ensure safe delivery of diagnostic imaging services.

“With these updates, the Joint Commission’s goal is to ensure that our imaging standards remain up to date and sufficiently address quality and safety,” said Margaret VanAmringe, MHS, executive vice president, Public Policy and Government Relations for the Joint Commission. “These rigorous imaging standards address overall patient safety, oversight of imaging services, staff competency, radiation safety procedures, equipment maintenance, and quality control. This system evaluation seeks to ensure that organizations providing imaging services have the requisite infrastructure and safety culture to minimize radiation exposure to patients and staff and provide safe and effective care.”

Standards changes will be addressed using a phased approach. The initial changes represent phase 1, which focuses on CT; nuclear medicine, including PET; and MR imaging services. Phase 2, to be implemented in 2015, will focus on fluoroscopy, minimum qualifications for clinicians who perform imaging exams, and cone-beam CT used in dental offices and oral–maxillary surgery practices. Areas addressed in the new and revised standards include: minimum competency for technologists, including registration and certification by July 1, 2015; annual performance evaluations of imaging equipment by a medical physicist; documentation of CT radiation dose in the patient’s clinical record; meeting the needs of the pediatric population through imaging protocols and considering patient size or body habitus when establishing imaging protocols; management of safety risks in the MR imaging environment; and collection of data on incidents in which preidentified radiation dose limits are exceeded.

The new and revised elements of performance are available at www.jointcommission.org/standards_information/pre-publication_standards.aspx and are divided into standards applicable to ambulatory care and those applicable to hospitals and critical access hospitals. The requirements will be published in the 2014 Ambulatory Care, Critical Access Hospital, and Hospital Comprehensive Accreditation Manuals scheduled for publication in March 2014 and in the spring 2014 E-dition update.

The Joint Commission