

## **Policy statement by Chiropractic Australia regarding the use of Diagnostic Radiology/Radiography in Chiropractic Practice**

Radiology may be a valuable diagnostic tool and its role in chiropractic practice has changed in keeping with advances in scientific research. Its use can serve several purposes in conjunction with a comprehensive history and physical examination findings, including: making a diagnosis; confirming the existence of pathology; determining the most appropriate method of care; and identifying contraindications or factors that would modify the type of care proposed.

Chiropractic Australia recommends that chiropractors use diagnostic radiography in patients with clinical indications based on the best available scientific evidence.<sup>1-4</sup>

Current evidence-based guidelines recommend that radiology now be used less frequently due to advances in other imaging technologies and the inherent limitations in plain film radiology. However, the decision to image patients must be evaluated on the specific circumstances of each case.<sup>5,6</sup> In patients with acute, non-specific spine pain, the best available scientific evidence supports limiting the use of diagnostic radiography to patients with so-called 'red flag' concerns, that may indicate the presence of potentially serious or life-threatening disorders.<sup>7-11</sup>

Chiropractic Australia considers it is inappropriate for clinicians to use diagnostic radiography solely for determining the need for manipulation, except in cases where it is important to eliminate the presence of a contra-indication for spinal manipulative therapy. The use of diagnostic radiography is not recommended for general biomechanical or postural analysis, either as a routine screening procedure, or as a serial or repeat procedure, except in the evaluation or the monitoring of progressive curvature of the spine (scoliosis).<sup>4,12</sup>

Adverse health risks accompany many diagnostic procedures including diagnostic radiography.<sup>13-18</sup> Where practitioners perform their own radiographic examinations, Chiropractic Australia supports and encourages the widely accepted principle of using exposure levels of ionizing radiation that are "as low as reasonably achievable" (ALARA). [http://www.arpansa.gov.au/pubs/rps/rps14\\_regreq.pdf](http://www.arpansa.gov.au/pubs/rps/rps14_regreq.pdf)

Chiropractic Australia advocates that practitioners must also comply with the provisions of the code of practice for radiation protection and the Application of Ionizing Radiation by Chiropractors (2009) or any subsequent version, as published by the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA Code), and applicable commonwealth, state or territory laws in relation to best practice (see [www.arpansa.gov.au](http://www.arpansa.gov.au) under Publications).

When used appropriately, the small adverse health risks associated with radiography are significantly outweighed by its positive benefits.<sup>19-29</sup>

\* This position paper refers only to the use of conventional diagnostic radiography (plain film radiographs), and does not address the use of other imaging methods such as CT, MRI, ultrasound or bone scan.

## References

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