

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

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30 March 2009

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Ministry of Health  
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WELLINGTON



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The Royal  
Australian and  
New Zealand  
College of  
Radiologists

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New Zealand

Dear Mark

I refer to your letter of 16 October 2008 concerning the legitimacy of Nurse Practitioners in requesting x-ray examinations.

Following extensive discussion both at New Zealand Committee and College Council levels, the New Zealand Committee considers that appropriately qualified and credentialed NPs should be able to refer for diagnostic imaging testing within their particular clinical context as approved by the local radiation licensee.

The attached statement was published in the March issue of the New Zealand newsletter in the last week, namely that requesting an x-ray examination is a valid use of NP services, and that Radiologists should work collaboratively and discuss any concerns with NPs.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Leadbitter'.

Mark Leadbitter  
Chair  
RANZCR New Zealand

Att.

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## **Nurse Practitioners and Imaging Referrals in New Zealand**

Nurse Practitioners are likely to have an increasing presence as members of hospital and community health care teams. They will have an increasing role as independent health practitioners, and as such Radiologists should work collaboratively with them in the best interests of optimal patient care.

### **Background**

- The Health Practitioners' Competency Assurance Act 2004 sets out 4 scopes of nursing practice, one of which is that of Nurse Practitioner (NP).
- The title is a protected one and can only be conferred by the Nursing Council of NZ.

### **Who are Nurse Practitioners?**

- They are expert nurses who work within a specifically defined area of practice.
- They have had at least 4 years of post-graduate experience in this specific area.
- NP's have gained a clinical Masters degree from an approved NZ university programme.
- Candidates present a portfolio and are interviewed by a panel constituted by the Nursing Council.
- There are potentially many roles for NP's to fill including community nursing, rural and remote areas, mental health, aged care and many specialised areas within DHB hospital settings.

### **What can NP's do?**

- NP's function as independent health professionals and also operate in collaboration with others in health care team settings.
- NP's are involved in clinical assessment, diagnosis and treatment.
- There is provision for prescribing by NP's within the current legislation, but this is not widespread at present because of limitations due to lack of access to the medical benefit and pharmaceutical benefit schemes in the community.
- It is within the scope of practice of NP's to order, interpret and act on the results of diagnostic tests, including imaging examinations.

### **What is the likely professional relationship between NP's and Radiology?**

- NP's will be credentialed to work in specific clinical areas, and this will determine the types of imaging they are likely to request.
- The radiological licensee can expect a certain level of understanding from those requesting examinations of radiation protection and minimization of lifetime patient doses of ionizing radiation.
- The licensee can also expect referrers to have an understanding of the relative merits of different imaging tests in relation to answering different clinical questions.
- As always, Radiological advice should be readily available and forthcoming when other health professionals are seeking their input in deciding the appropriateness of a particular test.

- It is likely that more sophisticated imaging and interventional procedures will remain within the domain of specialist medical referral in hospital settings.
- It is inappropriate for health professionals who have no, or very limited training in image interpretation to be offering patients their own opinion on the images without the radiologist's input or written report.
- As with all referrers, Radiologists should make themselves as available as possible to give timely verbal opinions to NP's to expedite patient care.

Mark Leadbitter  
Chair, New Zealand Branch