

Policy on Interpretation of Outside Radiologic Exams
UAB Department of Radiology
(Revised March 3, 2009)

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

There is increasing demand from clinical services for (1) archiving of and access to outside radiologic studies via Horizon and (2) official interpretations (second opinions) by UAB radiologists. We in the Department of Radiology are committed to doing what we can to meet these needs. We will, when technically feasible, electronically archive outside digital images so that they will be available for future reference. Film-based images will be digitally scanned and imported into UAB's radiological image archive for review on Horizon, although transfer of images to Horizon may occasionally fail because of technical problems beyond our control.

The provision of accurate and meaningful interpretations of outside radiological studies presents greater challenges. As a department, we are committed to the same level of excellence in the interpretation of outside examinations as for studies performed at UAB. Outside CT and MR studies, even if performed properly, lose information when they are transferred to film. Many of the manipulations that can be performed in the digital domain (such as adjustment of window settings and measurement of attenuation) cannot be done with hardcopy exams, and it is our opinion that the information that they contain falls below what we customarily require for interpretation. As well, for optimal patient care, all images that are formally interpreted should be viewable on Horizon and accessible to all physicians in the UAB Health System.

Because of these limitations, the Department of Radiology will no longer issue formal reports on these and certain other types of outside examinations (see below), although we may archive scanned images for future reference in selected cases.

OUTSIDE REPORTS

When providing a second opinion, it is often desirable for us to review the radiological report made by the initial interpreting radiologist. Referring physicians should therefore be urged to request reports when they obtain copies of outside radiological studies on their patients.

INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS

Radiologists are often asked to provide ad hoc opinions regarding outside studies without issuing a formal report (so-called "curbside consultations"). This practice should be avoided, as the referring physician may note his or her version of the radiologist's opinion in the medical record and there will be no official radiologic interpretation. Therefore, when such a request is made, the radiologist should dictate an outside study report at that time or subsequently. However, it is understood that radiologists have some latitude in applying this policy. For example, if the outside exam is of poor quality, they may say so and recommend a repeat study without issuing a report.

INTERPRETATION POLICIES

Exams of substandard quality, whether on digital media or film, may be changed to reference only at the discretion of the attending radiologist. We may also choose, in some cases, not to formally interpret any study for which there is no original radiologic report or appropriate clinical history.

Outside studies to be archived for reference only:

1. Exams older than 1 year at the time of submission (unless required for comparison with a subsequent UAB study). In this instance, we may provide an addendum to the UAB report rather than perform a separate examination.
2. All ultrasound and angiography examinations.
3. CT and MRI examinations on film.

Outside exams accepted for interpretation:

1. Most radiographic exams (chest, abdominal or bone radiographs) that are provided on film or that can be imported from CD-ROM or other digital media.
2. CT and MR studies that can be successfully imported from CD-ROM or other digital media and are viewable on the Department of Radiology PACS.
3. Mammograms on film will be taken to The Kirklin Clinic for interpretation. Only digital mammograms will be imported for display on PACS.
4. PET studies may be interpreted at the discretion of the interpreting physician.

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Multiple outside exams:

If several outside exams of the same type are submitted for interpretation, a report will only be issued on the most recent one that can be imported or scanned into our PACS. The remaining exams will be archived for reference only, but may be used for comparison at the discretion of the interpreting radiologist. A formal interpretation will be issued for multiple exams of the same type only in response to special requests.

Non-importable outside exams:

Image distribution on digital media has not been standardized by imaging vendors, and therefore not all images on digital media can be successfully imported into UAB's image archive and viewed on our PACS workstations. If an exam cannot be imported, a formal report documenting this will be issued. In urgent cases, we will attempt to view the images directly from digital media and provide an interpretation. Even if a report is issued, however, the images will not be available on Horizon. We may provide storage of the digital media onsite or elsewhere, however access to them will be limited.

Approvals:

Reginald F. Munden, MD, DMD, MBA
Professor and Chairman

Franklin N. Tessler, MD, CM
Medical Director of Radiology
Informatics

Colleen Sanders, MD
Medical Director, Inpatient
Radiology

David E. Hogg, J.D., M.D.
Medical Director, Outpatient Radiology

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