The Joint Commission Announces New Speak Up™ Campaign to Educate Public on Medical Imaging Tests

Speak Up is a Free Public Service Campaign Provided by The Joint Commission to Health Care Organizations and Providers

(OAKBROOK TERRACE, Ill. – December 8, 2014) Health care organizations and providers now have access to a new Joint Commission public service campaign “Speak Up™: X-rays, MRIs and other medical imaging tests.” The campaign, written in easy-to-understand language for patients, highlights the benefits and risks of medical imaging tests and outlines suggested precautions.

The new Speak Up campaign features an infographic that can be downloaded and printed for display in a health care organization, or posted on a website or social media channel. To develop the infographic, the Joint Commission worked with the Alliance for Radiation Safety in Pediatric Imaging, American College of Radiology, Radiological Society of North America, and the Society for Pediatric Radiology.

Included in the infographic are simple definitions for X-rays, ultrasound, computed tomography, magnetic resonance imaging and nuclear scans. For each type of imaging covered in the infographic, there is an explanation of what health care conditions it is used for and what happens during the procedure. The infographic also includes information and guidance for patients and a list of suggested questions they should ask their provider when making a decision about whether to undergo a medical imaging test.

“The Joint Commission is issuing this infographic to assist health care organizations and providers with informing patients about the benefits and risks of imaging procedures, as well as precautions,” said Ana Pujols McKee, M.D., executive vice president and chief medical officer, The Joint Commission. “As providers, it is our responsibility to help patients fully understand
what the benefits and risks are for every imaging procedure, so they can make an informed personal decision on what is best for their health."

The potential risks from medical imaging tests include: over-exposure to radiation; increased cumulative radiation exposure; misdiagnosis or delayed diagnosis due to an improperly administered test; and physical reaction to contrast dyes, gels or medicines used during a test. The Joint Commission has previously addressed associated safety issues and provided recommended solutions for providers in its Sentinel Event Alert newsletters including:

- Sentinel Event Alert # 47, Radiation risks of diagnostic imaging
- Sentinel Event Alert, Issue 38: Preventing accidents and injuries in the MRI suite

The Joint Commission’s award-winning Speak Up program urges patients to take an active role by becoming involved and informed participants on their health care team. The Speak Up program encourages consumers to:

- Speak up if you have questions or concerns. If you still don’t understand, ask again. It’s your body and you have a right to know.
- Pay attention to the care you get. Always make sure you’re getting the right treatments and medicines by the right health care professionals. Don’t assume anything.
- Educate yourself about your illness. Learn about the medical tests you get, and your treatment plan.
- Ask a trusted family member or friend to be your advocate (advisor or supporter).
- Know what medicines you take and why you take them. Medicine errors are the most common health care mistakes.
- Use a hospital, clinic, surgery center, or other type of health care organization that has been carefully checked out. For example, The Joint Commission visits hospitals to see if they are meeting The Joint Commission’s quality standards.
- Participate in all decisions about your treatment. You are the center of the health care team.

First launched in March 2002, together with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, the Speak Up program features free infographics, brochures, posters and animated videos. There are no copyright or reprinting permissions required. Copies of the Speak Up materials are available for download on The Joint Commission website at: http://www.jointcommission.org/speakup.aspx. To sign up to receive alerts on future issues of Speak Up, please visit
Statements of support for the Speak Up™: “X-rays, MRIs and other medical imaging tests” initiative

“The Society for Pediatric Radiology (SPR) strongly supports the Joint Commission’s Speak Up™ initiative for medical imaging and believes that patient and family education is critical to more appropriate and safer use of medical imaging in the care of all patients, but especially in the care of children. The SPR is a professional medical association with 2,100 members who practice in every medical setting across North America. The SPR is dedicated to excellence in health care for children through appropriate and safe use of medical imaging. For more information go to www.pedrad.org.” Richard Barth, M.D., chair, SPR Board of Directors, on behalf of the Board.

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Founded in 1951, The Joint Commission seeks to continuously improve health care for the public, in collaboration with other stakeholders, by evaluating health care organizations and inspiring them to excel in providing safe and effective care of the highest quality and value. The Joint Commission accredits and certifies more than 20,500 health care organizations and programs in the United States, including hospitals and health care organizations that provide ambulatory and office-based surgery, behavioral health, home care, laboratory and nursing home services. An independent, not-for-profit organization, The Joint Commission is the nation’s oldest and largest standards-setting and accrediting body in health care. The Joint Commission has two nonprofit affiliate organizations: The Joint Commission Center for Transforming Healthcare aims to solve health care’s most critical safety and quality problems and Joint Commission Resources (JCR) provides consulting services, educational services and publications. Joint Commission International, a division of JCR, accredits and certifies international health care organizations. Learn more about The Joint Commission at www.jointcommission.org.