



Advanced Practice

Fluoroscopy Scope Expansion: Part 1



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Today's column focuses on who can use fluoroscopy equipment with the intention of broadening this scope to include advanced practice providers. Fluoroscopy is a type of medical imaging in which an x-ray beam is passed through a body part to show more detail. When engaging the fluoroscope, the x-ray beam is running continuously and will show images on a monitor, similar to a "movie." It is used for a growing list of examinations, such as catheter/tube/drain placements, angiograms, lumbar puncture and myelography, stent and filter placements, and gastrointestinal studies. If as an advanced practice provider in radiology your main role is performing procedures, then you would likely use fluoroscopy every day.

Strict regulations regarding use of ionizing radiation are defined at the state and federal levels, specifically, where and what equipment can be operated, how it can be operated, and who can operate such equipment. Generally in medicine, the only clinicians that can operate x-ray equipment are radiologists, radiologic technologists, and registered radiologist assistants. As radiology practices expand to include advanced practice providers (nurse practitioners [NPs] and physician assistants [PAs]), it is pertinent to expand the law to include this group of capable proceduralists.

Laws vary vastly from state to state. An American College of Radiology (ACR) article on fluoroscopy scope expansions states "As of 2018, 22 states included advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) within their scope of fluoroscopy practice. Twenty-three states included APRNs within their scope of operating x-rays (ACR, 2013; Fluoroscopy Scope Expansion, n.d.)." It is difficult to find this information without delving into each state's practice acts and department of public health standards. However, that legwork will be extremely important when pleading the case of scope expansion before your individual state.

There are more states that allow PAs to operate fluoroscopy equipment than nurse practitioners and speculation can attribute this to PAs being the predominant advanced practice provider within radiology in prior years. In 2009, the American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA) and the American Society of Radiologic Technologists (ASRT) collaborated to create an educational framework for PAs which is divided into two sections, 40 hours of didactic instruction and 40 clinical hours, followed by passing an examination set forth by the American Registry of Radiologic Technologists

(PAs and Fluoroscopy, 2015). States are not bound to any part of this agreement, and some states may not be receptive to this expansion of practice. This collaborative work is a pivotal example of laying the groundwork for expanding fluoroscopy privileges to all advanced practice providers practicing in radiology in the country.

The ACR–AAPM technical standard for management of the use of radiation in fluoroscopic procedure (2013) lists ancillary personnel, presumably advanced practice providers, as individuals who may perform fluoroscopically guided imaging procedures under direct or personal supervision and outlines similar educational requirements as discussed previously.

With the foundation laid, the work must be performed state by state. In my home state of Connecticut, my first steps were to reach out to my PA colleagues to learn about their legislative journey and network with varied radiology staff members to hear what their concerns are. From there, contact your state's professional society (or local chapter) who may have lobbyist who can help you build and present this practice change. I am proposing that nurse practitioners in Connecticut who practice in a radiology setting and need to use fluoroscopy be afforded the same fluoroscopy privilege and be held to the same educational standard as agreed on by the AAPA-ASRT consensus. I cannot emphasize enough that the additional education is essential to uphold the safety standard. The buzz in health care is efficiency and health care personnel practicing to the top of their license, and this initiative is exactly that.

I encourage you to write to me about what is happening in your state and your thoughts on this topic at laura.prior@hhchealth.org.

References

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