

Positron Emission Tomography – PET scans

Almost eight years ago, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care decided to conduct clinical trials to determine whether it should fund Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scans for patients with certain cancers and other conditions. The lengthy delays in this evaluation and clinical trials prompted more than **45** complaints to the Ombudsman from doctors, patients and other stakeholders, many of whom argued that Ontario was lagging far behind other provinces in the use of this technology. Ontario has **nine** PET scanners in five cities across the province.

At the conclusion of his investigation in the spring of 2009, the Ombudsman met with the Deputy Minister to review his findings and recommendations, which focused on the need for clarity and speed when assessing new technologies, as well as expediting access to government funded PET scans for those who meet the Ministry's criteria. The Ombudsman also stressed the need to increase awareness of the Ministry's access program, which allowed other patients who did not meet its criteria to apply for special consideration to access PET scans.

In response to the Ombudsman's findings, the Ministry announced on July 23, 2009 that it would make PET a publicly insured health service for certain cancer and cardiac indications. Previously, physicians had to request access to PET for their patients from the Ministry through a process that was not entirely clear or particularly well communicated. The Ministry also agreed to a reform of the PET Steering Committee, and to establish a process for considering additional indications to be insured for PET. It also committed to ensuring that there would be more openness and transparency in its communications with physicians and the public and that future technology assessments would be better planned and resourced, with appropriate accountability throughout.

In light of the Ministry's response to his findings, the Ombudsman determined that the matter could be resolved without a published report. At the time this report was written, the Ministry was developing an accountability agreement with Cancer Care Ontario (CCO) to look at uninsured PET services.

In February 2010, Ombudsman staff met with representatives from CCO to discuss issues relating to PET. Once the accountability agreement is finalized, a process will then be developed with respect to considering other types of indications for an insured service. The Ombudsman will continue to monitor the Ministry's progress in ensuring access to PET scans and in improving the evaluation of emerging technologies.

“Your team is to be congratulated for their dogged and thorough approach to moving this important PET scan issue forward. Your continued monitoring gives people some confidence that the program will be rolled out as described. God bless all of you.”

– Darwin Brunne, comment posted at Ombudsman.on.ca