

# ACR–SAR PRACTICE PARAMETER FOR THE PERFORMANCE OF EXCRETORY UROGRAPHY

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The American College of Radiology will periodically define new practice parameters and technical standards for radiologic practice to help advance the science of radiology and to improve the quality of service to patients throughout the United States. Existing practice parameters and technical standards will be reviewed for revision or renewal, as appropriate, on their fifth anniversary or sooner, if indicated.

Each practice parameter and technical standard, representing a policy statement by the College, has undergone a thorough consensus process in which it has been subjected to extensive review and approval. The practice parameters and technical standards recognize that the safe and effective use of diagnostic and therapeutic radiology requires specific training, skills, and techniques, as described in each document. Reproduction or modification of the published practice parameter and technical standard by those entities not providing these services is not authorized.

## PREAMBLE

This document is an educational tool designed to assist practitioners in providing appropriate radiologic care for patients. Practice Parameters and Technical Standards are not inflexible rules or requirements of practice and are not intended, nor should they be used, to establish a legal standard of care<sup>1</sup>. For these reasons and those set forth below, the American College of Radiology and our collaborating medical specialty societies caution against the use of these documents in litigation in which the clinical decisions of a practitioner are called into question.

The ultimate judgment regarding the propriety of any specific procedure or course of action must be made by the practitioner considering all the circumstances presented. Thus, an approach that differs from the guidance in this document, standing alone, does not necessarily imply that the approach was below the standard of care. To the contrary, a conscientious practitioner may responsibly adopt a course of action different from that set forth in this document when, in the reasonable judgment of the practitioner, such course of action is indicated by variables such as the condition of the patient, limitations of available resources, or advances in knowledge or technology after publication of this document. However, a practitioner who employs an approach substantially different from the guidance in this document may consider documenting in the patient record information sufficient to explain the approach taken.

The practice of medicine involves the science, and the art of dealing with the prevention, diagnosis, alleviation, and treatment of disease. The variety and complexity of human conditions make it impossible to always reach the most appropriate diagnosis or to predict with certainty a particular response to treatment. Therefore, it should be recognized that adherence to the guidance in this document will not assure an accurate diagnosis or a successful outcome. All that should be expected is that the practitioner will follow a reasonable course of action based on current knowledge, available resources, and the needs of the patient to deliver effective and safe medical care. The purpose of this document is to assist practitioners in achieving this objective.

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<sup>1</sup> *Iowa Medical Society and Iowa Society of Anesthesiologists v. Iowa Board of Nursing*, 831 N.W.2d 826 (Iowa 2013) Iowa Supreme Court refuses to find that the "ACR Technical Standard for Management of the Use of Radiation in Fluoroscopic Procedures (Revised 2008)" sets a national standard for who may perform fluoroscopic procedures in light of the standard's stated purpose that ACR standards are educational tools and not intended to establish a legal standard of care. See also, *Stanley v. McCarver*, 63 P.3d 1076 (Ariz. App. 2003) where in a concurring opinion the Court stated that "published standards or guidelines of specialty medical organizations are useful in determining the duty owed or the standard of care applicable in a given situation" even though ACR standards themselves do not establish the standard of care.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This practice parameter has been developed by the American College of Radiology (ACR) and the Society of Abdominal Radiology (SAR) to assist physicians supervising the performance or interpretation of excretory urography (EU).

Properly performed EU is a diagnostic radiologic imaging test that can provide information about the kidneys and urinary tract. It is not possible to detect all abnormalities using EU, such as small renal masses or other renal parenchymal abnormalities.

EU is a radiographic examination in which anatomic and physiologic abnormalities of the urinary tract are detected by obtaining a timed series of images of the abdomen and pelvis before and after the injection of intravenous (IV) iodinated contrast media. Before the advent of cross-sectional imaging examinations, this examination was, for several decades, the primary imaging method for evaluating the urinary tract. It has now been almost completely supplanted by cross-sectional imaging techniques, particularly computed tomography CT urography in adults and MR urography in children. Occasionally, EU is still performed for imaging of the urinary tract. Typically, an EU includes one or more images of the abdomen before an IV contrast medium is administered (referred to as "scout images" or "preliminary images") and sequential images after contrast medium administration. Tomograms may be obtained when appropriate and technically feasible.

The terms "intravenous urography" and "intravenous pyelography" are used as synonyms for EU. In this practice parameter, the term "contrast media/medium" refers specifically to water-soluble iodinated contrast media that are administered intravenously.

## **II. INDICATIONS, CONTRAINDICATIONS, AND CAUTIONS**

### **A. Indications**

Relative merits of EU versus other imaging examinations including ultrasound (US), CT, nuclear medicine, and MR imaging should be considered in selecting the most appropriate test for the specific patient [1-5].

The indications for an EU examination include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Evaluation of patients with suspected or known ureteral obstruction.
2. Assessment of the integrity of the urinary tract following trauma or therapeutic interventions, especially when cross-sectional imaging is inappropriate or unavailable. One example of such an indication is an examination performed in the operating room when a trauma patient is too unstable to undergo cross-sectional imaging prior to surgery.
3. Assessment of the urinary tract for suspected congenital anomaly, when thought to be more appropriate than cross-sectional imaging.
4. Assessment of the upper urinary tract (renal collecting systems and ureters) for urothelial lesions that may explain hematuria and for identification of urinary tract abnormalities that may predispose to infection, especially when cross-sectional examinations using US, CT, or MR imaging are either unavailable or felt to be inappropriate for the clinical circumstance.
5. Follow-up of patients with recurrent renal/ureteral calculi, with a limited number of images obtained before and after contrast medium administration. Such limited studies may reduce the patient's radiation burden compared with repetitive CT studies.

EU should not be used to assess the kidneys for parenchymal lesions, as it has only 67% sensitivity in detecting renal masses  $\geq 3$  cm in diameter [6]. Without tomography, the sensitivity is even lower. Because cross-sectional imaging studies outperform EU in renal parenchymal evaluation [7], they are the study of choice for this indication.

### **B. Contraindications and Cautions**

Issues related to use of intravascular iodinated contrast media administration, including relative contraindications to its use and when premedication should be considered, are discussed in detail in the [ACR Manual on Contrast](#)

[Media](#) and other publications [8-11].

Pregnancy is a relative contraindication to EU. For the pregnant or potentially pregnant patient presenting with acute abdominal pain, a limited EU may be indicated in special circumstances (with a minimal number of radiographs obtained). In general, low-dose CT or MR is preferable to a limited EU [12].

For additional information concerning the performance of imaging studies requiring contrast media injections or ionizing radiation on the pregnant or potentially pregnant patient, see the [ACR Manual on Contrast Media \[8\]](#) and the [ACR–SPR Practice Parameter for Imaging Pregnant or Potentially Pregnant Patients with Ionizing Radiation \[13\]](#).

### III. QUALIFICATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF PERSONNEL

See the [ACR–AAPM–SIIM–SPR Practice Parameter for Digital Radiography \[14\]](#).

The interpreting physician should have training in the performance, interpretation, and reporting of EU and integration of other imaging examinations in the evaluation of the urinary tract, such as US, CT, nuclear medicine, and MR imaging.

The interpreting physician must also:

1. Be familiar with the disease processes for which the patient is being evaluated and understand the urographic manifestations of these diseases as well as variants of normal anatomy and congenital anomalies.
2. Have an understanding of and experience in proper imaging technique, image sequencing, and the use of tomography, as well as the volume and concentration of appropriate IV contrast media.
3. Be available in person or via electronic connection (remote access to PACS or other teleradiology connection) to monitor the examination and tailor the imaging sequence to answer the clinical question.

A physician must be available to assess and treat the patient in the event of a contrast reaction. The physician should have training in the recognition and treatment of adverse reactions to IV contrast media [8-12].

### IV. SPECIFICATIONS OF THE EXAMINATION

The written or electronic request for EU should provide sufficient information to demonstrate the medical necessity of the examination and allow for its proper performance and interpretation.

Documentation that satisfies medical necessity includes 1) signs and symptoms and/or 2) relevant history (including known diagnoses). The provision of additional information regarding the specific reason for the examination or a provisional diagnosis would be helpful and may at times be needed to allow for the proper performance and interpretation of the examination.

The request for the examination must be originated by a physician or other appropriately licensed health care provider. The accompanying clinical information should be provided by a physician or other appropriately licensed health care provider familiar with the patient's clinical problem or question and consistent with the state scope of practice requirements. (ACR Resolution 35, adopted in 2006 – revised in 2016, Resolution 12-b)

#### A. Patient Selection and Preparation

Appropriate history should be obtained and a preprocedure screening should be performed by personnel familiar with the various risk factors, preparation, and premedication strategies [8,9,15,16]. Patients should be evaluated for factors predisposing them to adverse reactions to iodinated contrast media. Appropriate precautions should be taken in any patient in whom risk factors are identified.

Substantially decreased renal function is another relative contraindication to EU because patients with poor renal function may not be able to excrete the administered contrast material at a sufficient rate or amounts to obtain a diagnostic examination.

## B. Injection of Iodinated Contrast Media

Care and preparation of IV access sites are the responsibility of the health care professional who injects the contrast medium. The contrast medium used for the study may vary with the institution.

The physician or, if state and local regulations permit, the radiologic technologist, registered nurse, or other appropriately credentialed health care practitioner may inject the contrast media.[\[1\]](#) An appropriately trained individual who is aware of the signs and symptoms of adverse reactions to contrast medium must monitor the patient for the development of these signs and symptoms during the examination [\[9,10,17,18\]](#). Appropriate personnel must be available to respond promptly to any adverse reactions that might occur.

Appropriate emergency equipment and medications must be immediately available to treat adverse reactions associated with administered medications. The equipment and medications should be monitored for inventory and drug expiration dates on a regular basis. The equipment, medications, and other emergency support must also be appropriate for the range of ages and sizes in the patient population.

## C. Image Acquisition:

Image acquisition should be tailored to the specific needs of the patient to optimize the examination and yet limit radiation exposure.

1. Preliminary image(s) should be evaluated prior to the injection of contrast media to check patient positioning and technique and to assess for radiopaque urinary tract calculi. The obtained image should include the abdomen from just above the kidneys to a level below the symphysis pubis [\[5,15,19,20\]](#). When indicated, an additional image centered over the kidneys should be obtained to assess for renal calculi, in addition to an image of the abdomen and pelvis.
2. Postcontrast sequential images should be obtained to evaluate the kidneys, upper collecting systems, ureters, and urinary bladder. These images should be tailored to address the clinical question(s) [\[5,19,20\]](#). When indicated, nephrotomograms are necessary to optimize renal parenchyma evaluation in a patient who has no recent cross-sectional imaging studies, recognizing that EU is not as sensitive as CT, MR, or US in detecting a small renal mass.
3. Imaging with abdominal compression may be useful in optimally distending and opacifying the collecting systems. The appropriateness of compression should be assessed in individual patients as abdominal compression may be contraindicated in patients with a large abdominal aortic aneurysm, a history of recent abdominal surgery, ostomies, or trauma, as well as in other clinical situations.
4. When indicated, the addition of oblique images of the abdomen may be useful for optimal assessment of the entire collecting systems and ureters. Prone images may assist in opacification of dilated ureters [\[21\]](#). An additional radiograph with the patient upright can be obtained in patients with suspected urinary tract obstruction; such an image is sensitive for detecting low-grade obstruction.
5. Images centered over the pelvis may be obtained for assessment of a full bladder for wall irregularities and intraluminal masses. A postvoid image may be useful to assess bladder emptying or facilitate visualization of bladder masses; in some patients, bladder masses are more easily seen on a postvoid image.

[\[1\]](#) See the ACR–SPR Practice Parameter for the Use of Intravascular Contrast Media.

## V. DOCUMENTATION

Reporting should be in accordance with the [ACR Practice Parameter for Communication of Diagnostic Imaging Findings](#) [\[22\]](#).

## VI. RADIATION SAFETY IN IMAGING

Radiologists, medical physicists, non-physician radiology providers, radiologic technologists, and all supervising physicians have a responsibility for safety in the workplace by keeping radiation exposure to staff, and to society as a whole, "as low as reasonably achievable" (ALARA) and to assure that radiation doses to individual patients are appropriate, taking into account the possible risk from radiation exposure and the diagnostic image quality necessary to achieve the clinical objective. All personnel who work with ionizing radiation must understand the key principles of occupational and public radiation protection (justification, optimization of protection, application of dose constraints and limits) and the principles of proper management of radiation dose to patients (justification, optimization including the use of dose reference levels). [https://www-pub.iaea.org/MTCD/Publications/PDF/PUB1775\\_web.pdf](https://www-pub.iaea.org/MTCD/Publications/PDF/PUB1775_web.pdf)

Nationally developed guidelines, such as the [ACR's Appropriateness Criteria®](#), should be used to help choose the most appropriate imaging procedures to prevent unnecessary radiation exposure.

Facilities should have and adhere to policies and procedures that require ionizing radiation examination protocols (radiography, fluoroscopy, interventional radiology, CT) to vary according to diagnostic requirements and patient body habitus to optimize the relationship between appropriate radiation dose and adequate image quality. Automated dose reduction technologies available on imaging equipment should be used, except when inappropriate for a specific exam. If such technology is not available, appropriate manual techniques should be used.

Additional information regarding patient radiation safety in imaging is available from the following websites – Image Gently® for children ([www.imagegently.org](http://www.imagegently.org)) and Image Wisely® for adults ([www.imagewisely.org](http://www.imagewisely.org)). These advocacy and awareness campaigns provide free educational materials for all stakeholders involved in imaging (patients, technologists, referring providers, medical physicists, and radiologists).

Radiation exposures or other dose indices should be periodically measured by a Qualified Medical Physicist in accordance with the applicable ACR Technical Standards. Monitoring or regular review of dose indices from patient imaging should be performed by comparing the facility's dose information with national benchmarks, such as the ACR Dose Index Registry and relevant publications relying on its data, applicable ACR Practice Parameters, NCRP Report No. 172, Reference Levels and Achievable Doses in Medical and Dental Imaging: Recommendations for the United States or the Conference of Radiation Control Program Director's National Evaluation of X-ray Trends; 2006, 2009, amended 2013, revised 2023 (Res. 2d).

## **VII. QUALITY CONTROL AND IMPROVEMENT, SAFETY, INFECTION CONTROL, AND PATIENT EDUCATION**

Policies and procedures related to quality, patient education, infection control, and safety should be developed and implemented in accordance with the ACR Policy on Quality Control and Improvement, Safety, Infection Control, and Patient Education appearing under the heading *Position Statement on QC & Improvement, Safety, Infection Control, and Patient Education* on the ACR website (<https://www.acr.org/Advocacy-and-Economics/ACR-Position-Statements/Quality-Control-and-Improvement>).

Equipment performance monitoring should be in accordance with the [ACR–AAPM Technical Standard for Diagnostic Medical Physics Performance Monitoring of Radiographic Equipment](#) [23].

## **VIII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This practice parameter was revised according to the process described under the heading *The Process for Developing ACR Practice Parameters and Technical Standards* on the ACR website (<https://www.acr.org/Clinical-Resources/Practice-Parameters-and-Technical-Standards>) by the Committee on Practice Parameters – General, Small, Emergency, and/or Rural Practices of the ACR Commission on General, Small, Emergency, and/or Rural Practices in collaboration with the SAR.

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