

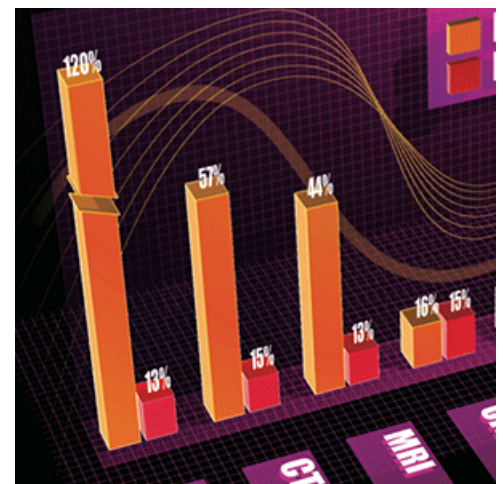
Over the past several years, the teleradiology field has evolved and become mainstream, intimately integrating into everyday radiology practice, Michael Yuz, MD, MBA, CEO and founder, USARAD.com and SecondOpinions.com, told ADVANCE. In fact, "radiology and teleradiology can be used interchangeably," he said. "Virtually every radiologist today can be considered to be a teleradiologist as well."

He attributes the growth to rapid technological web-based advances in the field. "Today, radiologists working in the hospital, at home or even on the plane with WIFI connections may be using the same 'on-demand' platform to view images and generate radiology reports," he said. As teleradiology becomes standard practice, the field is experiencing its own shifts as healthcare evolves.

Shift to Hospitals: In the initial phases of teleradiology, tremendous competition for hospital coverage led to a boom in the private sector, according to Anand P. Lalaji, MD, founder and chief medical officer, The Radiology Group, LLC. Now, however, a shift is occurring, leading teleradiology groups to focus their attention on hospital business. Lalaji is not sure whether to attribute this shift to the creation of accountable care organizations, healthcare reform, or hospitals buying out practices, but believes it is most likely due to a combination of these three factors. As a result, hospital systems have begun to work with the current contracted radiology groups to either consolidate to one group or have some type of working agreement amongst the various radiology groups to create a local teleradiology service, noted Charles Demanche, consultant, Soyring Consulting, St. Petersburg, FL. This provides a local solution to 24/7 and specialty coverage without going outside the local radiology groups.

Mammography: Lalaji reported telemammography is gaining in popularity across the country. In the past, when groups adopted a teleradiology model, they often left mammography to the local groups, he said. Now, teleradiology groups are focusing more on delivering the interpretation for mammography. Mammography is "a different animal" with its own guidelines and compliance issues, and performing interpretation via telemedicine can be tricky, Lalaji said, but if it's done properly, it's actually a tremendous benefit to the end user. Studies have shown that while the number of mammograms has increased, the actual facilities that support mammography have decreased, as well as the number of radiologists coming out of residency and fellowship programs reading them, he noted. As a result, telemammography is actually the fastest growing teleradiology modality right now.

Support Mechanism: One change in terms of perception is the changing landscape of the perceived notion that teleradiology groups are a threat to the on-site and local groups on the ground. Teleradiology groups are changing their motto in the sense of trying to be much more of a supportive mechanism, Lalaji explained. While 2-3 years ago, teleradiology groups were competing for the day-to-day business of hospital contracts, this model wasn't built for longevity, he said. Now, they have shifted to contractually supporting the onsite groups through subspecialization, overnight reads, as well as volume overflow. This monumental shift is occurring across the board amongst small and large teleradiology practices intent on protecting their reputations and delivering a quality product to hospital administrations, Lalaji stressed.



Consumerization: Healthcare reform and the digital age have accelerated the trend of consumer driven healthcare. Teleradiology is playing a part by allowing patients to easily access second opinions through the cloud. Yuz noted his company saw a demand and an opportunity to extend a service directly to consumers, by introducing two consumer websites -- XMRI.com and SecondOpinions.com. Secondopinions.com allows users to upload their original radiological images to a HIPPA-regulated, secure and confidential platform and receive a cost effective, expert, second opinion report within hours and even minutes, Yuz explained. "Because of teleradiology, obtaining a second opinion is more attainable than ever before, allowing people to have the peace of mind they deserve."

International Reach: The attainability teleradiology offers consumers doesn't stop at U.S. borders. Yuz told ADVANCE USARAD.com has gained numerous international clients in the Middle East, Europe, Caribbean, South America and even Africa. Yuz sees this trend continuing to accelerate over the next few years.

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