

Quality Assurance in Radiology

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Quality assurance can be defined as providing a service to the patient that meets certain acceptable professional standards. The concept of quality assurance (QA) is not new. It was introduced into Japan after the Second World War and the culture of QA has spread globally into most service industries including Medicine. Radiology is well suited to the concept of QA. We provide the patient and referring doctor with a service. The quality of the service can be measured objectively and can be compared with set standards that have been established by professional bodies. Such standards have been developed by the Royal College of Radiologists of the UK, the Australasian College of Radiologists and the American College of Radiologists. In South Africa, Alan Scher and Stuart Whittaker of the Council for Health Services Accreditation of Southern Africa (COHSASA) have developed local standards for radiology departments. These standards encompass radiation protection, patient data and image storage, resuscitation equipment, radiological equipment and staff training. COHSASA identifies departments which meet these set standards and provides certificates of quality service.

Why is QA important to the practising radiologist? Certification of a department will probably be a future requirement in all HMO contracts. Certification will also provide patients with information concerning the standard of radiological practice for a particular department. Presently COHSASA is assessing a number of private and public hospitals in South Africa. If a department does not meet minimum standards COHSASA will provide advice on how to improve the quality of service.

The concept is good with benefits for both the radiologist and patient. I would encourage you to take up this opportunity to apply for COHSASA certification. The Radiological Society and COHSASA will gladly provide you with further details on how to apply.

The Editor