

MEDIA RELEASE

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ACHI Encourages Consumer Access to Pathology Results

Patients should not have to wait indefinitely for their pathology results to be reviewed and uploaded by a clinician before being able to see them in their Personally Controlled Electronic Health Record, according to the Australasian College of Health Informatics (ACHI). ACHI President Associate Professor Chris Pearce said as part of the Government's recent consultation process for the PCEHR, ACHI's Program Evaluation Committee had conducted a targeted review on the topic of patient access to pathology results. The report of the committee, chaired by Monash University Senior Research Fellow Dr Chris Bain, is to be published in Pulse+IT Magazine this month.

ACHI's review found that there was no evidence demonstrating harm and in fact early evidence to suggest some consumer benefits from access to pathology and diagnostic imaging results. "The College acknowledges however the clinical cultural issues, and endorses the suggested seven day delay," A/Prof Pearce said. The current proposal has results being posted after a seven day delay, allowing clinicians time to review and contact patients before they get direct access.

Dr Bain noted that the review acknowledged the concerns about the effects direct access might have on GPs' traditional role as gatekeepers and the anxiety that could be experienced by patients reading results before their busy GPs have been able to curate them. "However, for clinicians with modern health informatics systems, this should not represent a barrier to access. The alternative, that all results should be clinically curated, represents an unacceptable workload on busy GPs."

"Our review shows patients value access, but are lacking on information as to why and what patient outcomes might be," A/Prof Pearce said. "Accordingly, ACHI supports the proposed model, with appropriate safeguards. Allowing consumers direct access to pathology results is new technology and must be framed in the context of improving the quality and safety of care.

"This means working with consumers to understand access and health literacy issues as well as targeting those with chronic diseases, where regular pathology is part of the care plan."

The full review report is available on the ACHI web site, www.ACHI.org.au.

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The Australasian College of Health Informatics is the professional body for Health Informatics in the Asia-Pacific Region. The credentialed Fellows and Members of the College are national and international experts, thought leaders and trusted advisers in Health Informatics. ACHI sets standards for education and professional practice in Health Informatics, supports initiatives, facilitates collaboration and mentors the community.

ACHI is an Academic Institutional Member of the International Medical Informatics Association (IMIA).

