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ATTORNEY DEAN LAING AND LAURA NOW CONTRIBUTE ARTICLE TO THE ABA HEALTH LAW LITIGATION NEWSLETTER

The article, published in the American Bar Association, Section of Litigation, Committee on Health Law Litigation's Winter 2010 Health Law Litigation Newsletter, discusses the common law development of a radiologist's duty to directly communicate his or her findings to a treating physician, and how the American College of Radiology's attempt to provide guidance to radiologists by establishing communication guidelines may not have had the effect that the ACR intended.

While the duty to directly communicate radiological findings has been firmly recognized by the courts for a number of years, courts have not been as consistent in articulating when that duty is triggered. The ACR originally set forth its recommendations to radiologists by creating its Standard for Communication-Diagnostic Radiology in September of 1991 which required radiologists to directly communicate their findings to treating physicians under certain circumstances. Since that time, this standard has undergone a number of revisions and is currently recognized as the ACR Practice Guideline for Communication of Diagnostic Imaging Findings. This Practice Guideline continues to provide guidance to radiologists regarding when direct communication with a treating physician may be necessary. More importantly, however, this Practice Guideline has increasingly been recognized and relied on by medical journal articles and the courts as evidence of a standard of care for the communication of radiological findings, despite the ACR's explicit statement that its standards are not to be used to establish a legal standard of care.

Keeping this trend in mind, whether relying on established case law or the guidelines established by the ACR, radiologists should be especially diligent in communicating directly with a treating physician when the circumstances surrounding the radiologist's findings mandate immediate communication.

A full copy of the A Radiologist's Duty to Communicate with the Treating Physician can be found here.