

New Medical Imaging Program to Expedite Employee Injury Treatment

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Oct. 29, 2002) Guy goes to the doctor with a terrible backache. The doctor checks him over, does an X-ray, but can't find the problem.



The doctor picks up the phone and requests an MRI. Within four days, the patient has had his MRI, the doctor has the film and a report and starts the patient's treatment. That's four days...not two weeks or more.

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If this sounds almost like a doctor joke, it's not. Under a new program to be launched in November, MTA employees who are injured on the job and whose injuries require diagnostic imaging – such as MRIs, CT Scans and EEGs – can expect equally quick service.

That's because MTA has contracted with Medical Diagnostics Associates (MDA), a nationwide network of diagnostic imaging centers. MDA guarantees it will schedule a patient's appointment within 48 hours of a request and will provide the film and a radiologist's report within 48 hours after that – if not sooner.

Specially trained unit

Backing this up, says Michael Koss, executive officer, Risk Management, will be a unit of specially trained MTA injury claims examiners who will be responsible for quickly assessing medical needs and authorizing the imaging. The unit is planning 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. hours in order to respond to calls from physicians.

"When the doctor feels it is critical to diagnose a condition and treat it appropriately," he says, "it should be done on an expedited basis to get the employee right into therapy."

The current practice for authorizing diagnostic imaging requires the doctor to send MTA a fax or letter request. Documenting and approving the request, notifying the doctor, waiting for the doctor to schedule an appointment for the patient and obtaining the results can take two weeks or longer.

Under the revised procedure, the doctor can phone MTA's claims unit while the patient is still on the examining table. After running through a short checklist of medical criteria with the doctor, the claims examiner can authorize the imaging.

Toll-free number

With the authorization, the physician then calls a toll-free number to schedule an appointment for the patient at a convenient MDA imaging center.

Participation in the program is voluntary and the patient and the doctor decide which center to use. Like the recently announced medical prescription program, the employee is not obligated to provide a co-payment or any up-front payment for the diagnostic imaging service.

Once the imaging is completed, the MDA radiologist will fax a report to the doctor. MDA also operates a physician-only Internet web site from which the doctor can download the radiologist's report.

"Under this new program," says Koss, "doctors will have the tools to work with more quickly in treating their patients. But, it's also critical that the employee reports the injury in a timely manner."

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