

Letter to the Editor

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Why a CT Scan Instead of a History and Physical Examination?

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In his insightful editorial on the increasing overreliance on imaging tests in medical practice, published in the July 2002 issue of *RadioGraphics* (1), Dr Heilman recommends taking a step back and returning to the old-

fashioned way: See the patients and think about them before ordering tests.

Probably all physicians, both novice and experienced, concur with this recommendation. And yet the habit of hasty and uncritical test ordering is becoming more and more pervasive among clinicians. The practice of defensive medicine could be partly blamed for that.

However, we think there is a more fundamental reason: Our modern society does not value properly the intellectual effort and the time spent studying the problems of patients and deciding on their solutions. Much higher rewards are placed on the use of sophisticated medical technology. Changing this way of practice requires much more than an academic call to order. As members of our modern society, we physicians have a tough time isolating ourselves from prevalent values. But we do have the duty to point out the inconsistencies of the present societal values regarding medical activities, striving to change this state of affairs for the benefit of medicine, patients, and society as a whole.

Reference

1. Heilman RS. What did the CT scan show? (editorial). *RadioGraphics* 2002; 22:894.