

### PET Scans to Become a Standard Procedure for Cancer Diagnosis



#### In this article

about PET (Positron Emission Tomography) scans, we look at where PET is going in the context of our provincial health care system.

As long ago as 1996, a leading cancer doctor in the United States described PET as “an essential clinical imaging tool in diagnosis and management for many patients with cancer.” More recently, an eminent Canadian cancer doctor said, that not to use a PET scan when dealing with lung cancer could verge on medical malpractice. And yet, PET scans are still not part of the continuum of care for cancer patients in British Columbia unless the patient pays. This

situation was understandable when PET was unavailable in BC. But now it is generally acknowledged that the time has come to find a way to integrate this technology into the health care system.

PET scans are an invaluable tool, providing unique information for most cancer types, including lung, breast and colorectal cancer, malignant melanoma and lymphoma. PET is also used in the diagnosis of certain diseases of the heart and brain.

Academic studies around the world have analyzed the efficacy and accuracy of PET for early diagnosis, detection of spread, and checking for recurrence of cancer. PET is better at this than all other imaging technologies because it creates images of the function of

the body’s cells and of the disease itself, while CT and other scans produce images of the body’s anatomy and organs without differentiating between diseased and healthy cells. This is not to say that CT is obsolete; in fact, a recent technological advancement fuses PET images with CT scans – providing even greater accuracy and definition.

Our Canadian health care system has a classification system for procedures. Where a procedure is classified by the provincial health authority as “medically necessary” the provincial health care system is obligated to provide it under its medical insurance system (MSP), otherwise it breaks the rules of the Canada Health Act. The provinces are understandably cautious about making a new procedure “medically necessary” especially when the equipment is expensive and the operating costs are high, as is the case with PET.

However, when the procedure is cost-effective – that is, the cost to the system of not using the procedure is demonstrated to be higher (as is the case with PET), and it is better for patient care, a strong argument can be made for the procedure to be classified as “medically necessary” and made available to all. This is what management at the Petscan centre is working towards and, we believe, will make happen soon. For the sake of cancer patients of the Province, the sooner the better.

#### A PET Scan:

- Is safe and there are no side effects;
- Can replace multiple medical procedures with a single exam;
- Can reduce or eliminate futile or unnecessary treatments;
- Can help with the planning of, or entirely eliminate, surgery;
- Can validate or alter patient care;
- Is done in less than three hours;
- Provides interpretations within 48 hours to your doctor.

#### Previous Articles

*In our series of articles about PET, we have discussed so far the following topics:*

1. PET – General Introduction (June 8)
2. The Vancouver PETSCAN Centre (June 15)
3. Use of PET in Lung Cancer (June 22)
4. Use of PET in Breast Cancer (June 29)
5. Use of PET in Colorectal Cancer (July 13)
6. Use of PET in Melanoma (July 27)
7. Use of PET in Lymphoma (August 10)
8. PET and the Health Care System (August 24)

*If you didn't have a chance to pick up a copy of any of these issues, you can find the articles on the PETSCAN Centre's website: [www.petscan.ca/news.htm](http://www.petscan.ca/news.htm)*

**Full-body clinical PET scans are available at the Vancouver PETSCAN Centre.**



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