

## **Scott & White Health Plan (SWHP) Radiology Quality Initiative Program Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Program Overview**

**Q. Who is American Imaging Management (AIM)?**

A. American Imaging Management, Inc. (AIM) is a radiology management company with national experience working with leading health plans to promote the most appropriate use of high tech diagnostic imaging services.

**Q. Why is SWHP implementing the Radiology Quality Initiative Program?**

A. SWHP has implemented the RQI Program to ensure appropriateness in the ordering of high tech imaging studies and to improve the quality, safety and cost effectiveness of diagnostic imaging services.

**Q. Why is SWHP focusing on reducing radiology costs?**

A: Focusing on the right test at the right time for the right patient could reduce unnecessary radiation exposure, save time and money, and increase productivity. Use of high tech studies (CT, MRI, PET, Nuclear Cardiology) grew at 37% last year. At the same time, nearly 30% of these tests may be unnecessary, inappropriate, or redundant. Imaging studies represent 10 – 12% of the health care dollar, and are the most rapidly growing health care expense category.

**Q. What are the goals of the RQI Program?**

A. SWHP RQI Program is built on AIM's Clinical Practice Guidelines, which are designed to evaluate and direct the appropriate utilization of high technology diagnostic imaging services. Through this process, quality, safety, and cost improvements are realized by:

- Advocating bio-safety issues, including reduction of unnecessary radiation exposure (for CT and plain film radiography)
- Enhancing quality of healthcare for diagnostic imaging studies using evidence-based medicine and outcomes research from numerous resources
- Encouraging standardization of medical practice patterns and reducing variation in clinical evaluation
- Curtailing the performance of inappropriate diagnostic imaging studies
- Promoting and guiding selection of the most efficient and cost-effective diagnostic imaging services

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**Program Design and Requirements**

**Q. What are the requirements for this program?**

- A. Ordering/referring non-radiological physicians must contact AIM to obtain an RQI number before scheduling elective outpatient diagnostic imaging services for SWHP members. In addition, radiology providers/free standing imaging centers should confirm that an RQI number was obtained prior to service delivery. Members will be directed to the SWHP-contracted imaging provider network for high tech imaging exams.

**Q. When will this program begin?**

- A. Beginning 10/22/07 AIM's call center and Web site, *ProviderPortal*<sub>SM</sub>, are available to obtain RQI numbers for imaging services occurring on or after 11/1/07.

**Q. What types of diagnostic imaging exams are covered under this program? What types are excluded?**

- A. The RQI Program targets outpatient elective CT scans, MRI, MRA, PET scans and Nuclear Cardiology studies. Imaging services provided in conjunction with emergency room visits, inpatient hospitalization, outpatient surgeries (hospital or freestanding surgery centers), or 23-hour observation are excluded from the program.

**Q. How does a physician office staff member obtain an RQI number from AIM?**

- A. There are three ways to obtain an RQI number for diagnostic imaging services:
- By registering at AIM's website: [www.americanimaging.net](http://www.americanimaging.net). After registration, a provider can follow the easy-to-use online process to request an RQI number through *ProviderPortal*<sub>SM</sub> – AIM's interactive Internet application
  - By calling AIM at 1-866-714-1104
  - By completing the AIM referring physician/professional provider fax form, including all relevant information and faxing to AIM at 1-800-610-0050

**Q. How does the RQI Program work?**

- A. Ordering physicians' offices submit RQI requests through *ProviderPortal*<sub>SM</sub> – AIM's interactive Internet application, through the AIM Call Center or by completing and faxing the AIM referring physician/professional provider fax form. Web users or callers will be guided through an interview where member and ordering physician information (name, ID number, etc), diagnosis, symptoms, exam type, and treatment/clinical history will be requested.

If the information provided meets AIM's clinical criteria, the web user/caller will then be guided to select an imaging provider where the imaging study will be performed, and an RQI number will be issued.

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If all criteria are not met or additional information or review is needed, the case is forwarded to a Registered Nurse (RN) who uses additional clinical experience and knowledge to evaluate the request against clinical guidelines. If an RQI number still cannot be assigned, the case is forwarded to an AIM Physician Reviewer (MD), who contacts the ordering physician directly to discuss the case and diagnostic imaging guidelines prior to issuing the RQI number. AIM's Diagnostic Imaging Clinical Guidelines serve as a foundation for this collegial discussion. These Guidelines are available for download on AIM's website, [www.americanimaging.net](http://www.americanimaging.net) . During this collegial discussion, it is AIM's experience that 3 percent to 6 percent of all requests result in a withdrawn request or are redirected to another service. Less than two percent of all exam requests do not meet medical necessity criteria although even in those cases the referring provider will receive an RQI number.

**Q. Does SWHP need to know when the procedure is scheduled?**

A. No, although the RQI number should be issued *prior to scheduling* the study. RQI numbers are valid for 60 days from the date of issuance.

**Q. Which members are included in the SWHP RQI Program?**

A. The RQI Program includes all SWHP members.

**Q. Will members be able to contact AIM?**

A. Members should contact the SWHP customer service phone number located on the back of their SWHP ID card if they have any questions about the SWHP RQI Program or their benefits.

**Q. How long is the RQI number valid?**

A. RQI numbers are valid for 60 days after the date of issue.

**Q: What is the imaging providers' role in the RQI Program?**

A: Radiology facilities are strongly encouraged to verify that an RQI number has been obtained prior to scheduling the study.

**Q. Can providers obtain retrospective RQI numbers?**

A. No, providers must follow the process to obtain RQI numbers prior to performing diagnostic imaging services under this program.

**Q. Are any physicians exempt from participating in this program?**

A. All ordering/referring physicians and imaging providers/facilities are required to comply with the SWHP RQI Program.

**Q. I am a hospital-based imaging provider. Does this program apply to me?**

A. Non-radiology specialists will be required to request a RQI number for outpatient elective high-tech imaging services regardless of their affiliation with a facility or practice. Inpatient diagnostic imaging is not included in this program.

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- Q. What online services does AIM offer? How do providers contact AIM after-hours?**
- A. **ProviderPortal<sub>SM</sub>** - AIM's interactive internet application – is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and helps ordering physicians and staff quickly and efficiently submit and verify RQI requests for SWHP members at any time via the web. A typical RQI request on the **ProviderPortal<sub>SM</sub>** takes approximately three (3) minutes to complete.
- Q. How long does it take to obtain a user password after registering on AIM's website?**
- A. If an email address is provided during the registration process, the password will be sent immediately upon completion of the registration.
- Q. Is the ordering physician required to obtain an RQI number for an urgent case and how does he/she do this in the evening and on weekends?**
- A. Emergency room services do not require an RQI number. Outpatient elective diagnostic imaging services are typically non-urgent in nature. For those rare requests that are medically urgent, providers should contact AIM through **ProviderPortal<sub>SM</sub>**, or on the next business day, through the AIM Call Center.

**Standards for Imaging Guidelines, Privileging and Credentialing**

- Q. Who develops the SWHP RQI Program criteria?**
- A:** AIM's guidelines for appropriate diagnostic imaging utilization have been reviewed and approved by NCQA and URAC and are reviewed annually by:
- An independent Physician Review Board, including cardiologists, orthopedic surgeons, radiologists, neurologists, and neurosurgeons
  - Client Medical Directors
  - Local Imaging Advisory Council (representing local physician communities)
- Q: What methods and resources are used to develop the guidelines?**
- A:** Development of AIM's Clinical Practice Guidelines involves integration of medical information from multiple sources to support the reproducible use of high quality and state-of-the-art diagnostic imaging services. The process for criteria development is based on technology assessment, peer-reviewed medical literature, including clinical outcomes research, and consensus opinion in medical practice.
- The primary resources used for AIM's Clinical Practice Guideline development include:
- American College of Radiology (ACR) Appropriateness Criteria
  - American Institute of Ultrasound in Medicine (AIUM)
  - Society of Nuclear Medicine (SNM)
  - American Academy of Neurology (AAN)
  - American College of Cardiology (ACC)
  - American Heart Association (AHA)
  - American Medical Association (AMA)
  - Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)