

Reducing the cost of health care: Advanced imaging. HB 2368.
Testimony to Health Care Committee.

Lots of attention – and discussion – is given to expanding access to health care. I think it's just as important to pay attention to reducing the cost of health care. Overuse of health care services is frequently cited as a major driver of health care spending. In some cases, excessive ordering of certain procedures such as MRIs and CT scans can be harmful due to over-exposure to radiation.

This bill directs the Oregon Health Policy Board to establish a workgroup that will investigate and develop recommended strategies for reducing the number of unnecessary advanced imaging tests ordered.

The *Annals of Medicine*, in 2009 published an article titled, *What a Texas town can teach us about health care*. One of the points that caught my eye was: “costlier care is often worse care.” Atul Gawande went on to explain that the primary cause of that town's high costs was, “very simply, the across-the-board overuse of medicine. This is a disturbing and perhaps surprising diagnosis. Americans like to believe that, with most things, more is better. But research suggests that where medicine is concerned it may actually be worse.”

Earlier this month, the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons released results of a study involving 72 surgeons who tracked tests for more than 2,000 patients in office visits, emergency rooms, and other settings. It showed that about 1/5 of tests that bone and joint specialists order are because a doctor fears being sued, not because the patient needs them. And you may have read in the Feb. 2011 issue of the State Legislatures magazine about accountable health care. “Savings may come from better preventive care, management of chronic diseases and coordination of care, all of which may require fewer expensive tests and treatments, and eliminate waste and duplication.”

So back to this bill, and advanced imaging: We know there's been an increase in the use of advanced images, expansion in the number of imaging centers, an increase in certain cancers, and physician and policy-maker concern about defensive medicine. Without pointing fingers or jumping to conclusions, and instead focusing only on reducing cost and improving patient outcomes, let's ask a group of good people to put their heads together and report conclusions and recommendations.

Radiation exposure increases the risk of cancer and genetic damage. In 2005, the *Journal of the American College of radiology* reported that 1/3 of imaging studies are inappropriate, and a 2007 *New England Journal of Medicine* study reported that 20% of cancers in the U.S. would be attributable to CT scans.

Imaging is one of many cost containment topics directed to the Oregon Health Policy Board to study. Further, the Oregon Health Policy and Research (OHPR) staff recommends “imaging appropriateness” as a target of study; it is identified by the National Priorities Partnership as an area having “potential to result in substantial improvements in health and health care, and thus accelerate fundamental change in our healthcare delivery system”.

The use of advanced imaging is both a cost issue, and a public health issue. This bill says let's get to work now on advanced imaging, since it provides opportunity for reducing cost -- and reducing risk.