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Dear California healthcare provider:

We'd like to ask for your help in improving care for children with minor head injuries. California ACEP is embarking on a campaign to avoid unnecessary head CT scans when harm may outweigh benefits. We believe this is an excellent opportunity for our specialty to provide better care to our patients, while at the same time showing the value of our training and clinical judgment and the value of emergency medicine in the health care delivery system. We are all striving to provide better care at a lower cost and this initiative provides an important ability to do so. National ACEP includes decreasing head CT scans for patients with minor head injuries in its Choosing Wisely campaign.

To accomplish our goal, we are promoting the use of one of the best available decision rules, the "PECARN" guideline, for identifying children at very low risk of clinically important brain injury after minor head trauma. This study, published by Dr. Nate Kuppermann from UC Davis, looked at over 42,000 children and developed a robust clinical decision rule that is easy to understand and use.

Between 20% and 60% of children presenting to EDs with head injury undergo head CT in the U.S., even though less than 1% of children with GCS of 14 – 15 have an injury that requires any kind of intervention. The risk of cancer later in life due to the radiation from a single CT scan is estimated at about 1/1000. PECARN has the potential to significantly reduce the number of unnecessary CT scans in children, the population most vulnerable to radiation risks.

One of the most powerful things about the PECARN guidelines is that observation is stressed as a safe and reasonable alternative to CT scan. If you send your head-injured patients to the Emergency Department, please make them aware that they may not always need a CT scan, and that they may have a period of observation after being assessed by a clinician.

California ACEP has developed a PECARN toolkit for primary care providers and ED physicians, including pocket reference cards that summarize the decision rule, brochures for parents explaining the issues surrounding head injury, scripting suggestions for clinicians, and a slideshow explaining the decision rule. We are pleased to offer you this toolkit in hopes that it will enhance your practice and prove useful to you.

Enclosed are laminated pocket cards for your use, a sample parent pamphlet, and a sample physician script. These items, as well as access to the full educational slide show and Dr. Kuppermann's original Lancet article, can be found at the California ACEP Website: www.californiaacep.org. Please contact California ACEP if you would like to arrange a speaker to present this information to your organization.

We are excited to partner with you in making healthcare better for all Californians. Please do not hesitate to contact us with comments and suggestions for this project as well as future projects.

Sincerely,

Valerie Norton, MD, FACEP
Chair, California ACEP Quality Improvement Task Force

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