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# Prior CT imaging history for patients who undergo PAN CT for acute traumatic injury

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**OBJECTIVE:** A single PAN scan may provide more radiation to a patient than is felt to be safe within a one-year period. Our objective was to determine how many patients admitted to the trauma service following a PAN scan had prior CT imaging within our six-hospital system. **METHODS:** We performed a secondary analysis of a prospectively collected trauma registry. The study was based at a level-two trauma center and five affiliated hospitals, which comprise 70.6% of all Emergency Department visits within a twelve county region of southern Texas. Electronic medical records were reviewed dating from the point of trauma evaluation back to December 5, 2005 to determine evidence of prior CT imaging. **RESULTS:** There were 867 patients were admitted to the trauma service between January 1, 2012 and December 31, 2012. 460 (53%) received a PAN scan and were included in the study group. The mean age of the study group was 37.7 +/- 1.54 years old, 24.8% were female, and the mean ISS score was 13.4 +/- 1.07. The most common mechanism of injury was motor vehicle collision (47%). 65 (14%; 95% CI = 11-18%) of the patients had at least one prior CT. The most common prior studies performed were: CT head (29%; 19-42%), CT Face (29%; 19-42%) and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (18%; 11-30%). **CONCLUSION:** Within our trauma registry, 14% of patients had prior CT imaging within our hospital system before their traumatic event and PAN scan.

**Prior CT Imaging History for Patients Who Undergo PAN CT for Acute Traumatic Injury**

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46 **ABSTRACT.**

47 A single PAN scan (combined CT head, neck, chest, and abdomen/pelvis) may provide more radiation to a  
48 patient than is felt to be safe within a one-year period. Our objective was to determine how many  
49 patients admitted to the trauma service following a PAN scan had prior CT imaging within our six-  
50 hospital system. We performed a secondary analysis of a prospectively collected trauma registry. The  
51 study was based at a level-two trauma center and five affiliated hospitals, which comprise 70.6% of all  
52 Emergency Department visits within a twelve county region of southern Texas. Electronic medical  
53 records were reviewed dating from the point of trauma evaluation back to December 5, 2005 to  
54 determine evidence of prior CT imaging. There were 867 patients were admitted to the trauma service  
55 between January 1, 2012 and December 31, 2012. 460/867 (53%) received a PAN scan and were  
56 included in the study group. The mean age of the study group was 37.7 +/- 1.54 years old, 24.8%  
57 were female, and the mean ISS (injury severity score) was 13.4 +/- 1.07. The most common  
58 mechanism of injury was motor vehicle collision (47%). 65 (14%; 95% CI = 11-18%) of the patients  
59 had at least one prior CT. The most common prior studies performed were: CT head (47.7%; 35-  
60 58%), CT face (30%; 21-38%) and CT abdomen and pelvis (20%; 12-31%). Within our trauma  
61 registry, 14% of patients had prior CT imaging within our hospital system before their traumatic event  
62 and PAN scan. As serial CTs incrementally increase the lifetime chance of malignancy, this risk  
63 should be weighed against evidence supporting the utility of the Pan CT in the primary evaluation of trauma  
64 patients.

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66

## 67 INTRODUCTION.

68

69 Over the past 20 years, computed tomography (CT) has emerged as the imaging modality of choice to  
70 evaluate patients for a wide range of pathology [1]. Consistent with this viewpoint, investigators have  
71 identified numerous conditions for which CT appears to enhance diagnostic accuracy in the acute  
72 setting. For example, emergency physicians who utilize CT to evaluate patients with abdominal pain  
73 appear to significantly reduce the need for surgery [2].

74

75 With such benefits in mind, it is not surprising CT use has grown exponentially over the past fifteen  
76 years. Investigators reviewing the National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey, observed the  
77 utilization of CT expanded 11 times faster than the rate of emergency department visits from 1996  
78 through 2007. In 1996, approximately 3.2 percent of emergency patients received a CT scan. By  
79 2007, the number had risen to almost 14 percent [3].

80

81 One area for which there has been significant expansion in CT utilization is for the evaluation of  
82 trauma patients. From 1998 to 2007 there was a national 3-fold increase in the use of CT scans in the  
83 ER for injury-related conditions [4]. From a diagnostic perspective, such practice appears well  
84 supported by findings within the surgical literature over the past decade. Investigators have reported  
85 as high as 74% unexpected findings when a PAN scan is utilized in patients where multisystem injury  
86 was not anticipated, and the potential to change treatment in 33% of patients [5, 6, 7].

87

88 Despite its apparent utility, the use of PAN CT in acute trauma remains controversial. Recent reports  
89 from the emergency medicine literature suggest the possibility of physician judgment guiding focused  
90 imaging. While there has been a 3-fold increase in utilization of CT scans for traumatic injury over a  
91 decade period, performing these scans has not significantly increased the overall identification rate of

92 life-threatening conditions [4, 8]. Of primary concern, the modality presents serious long-term risks of  
93 cancer causing morbidity and mortality. A single PAN scan provides significantly more radiation  
94 exposure than a conventional x-ray, and at a dose in excess of which is felt to be safe within a one-  
95 year period, by the International Symposium on the System of Radiological Protection (20 mSv) [9].  
96 Several published analyses suggest PAN scans could directly result in cancers as often as 1 in 380  
97 and cause 12.5 additional cancer deaths in 10,000 patients [10, 11].

98  
99 As radiation risk increases with higher doses and repeated exposure, patients suffer a higher  
100 likelihood of harm/malignancy from a PAN CT if she/he has had one or more earlier CT studies. [9]  
101 Despite the apparent importance of prior imaging history for acute setting patients, there is a paucity  
102 of research on this topic, and, particularly, with respect to trauma patients. One study, which utilized a  
103 questionnaire, found only 14.5% of medical practitioners discuss the risks of radiation exposure, with  
104 the patient, prior to CT imaging [12]. Our current study seeks to address a gap in the literature  
105 regarding our current understanding of prior imaging history for ED patients. Specifically, we  
106 conducted a secondary analysis of a prospectively collected trauma registry and review of a 6-hospital  
107 electronic imaging database to test the hypothesis that a significant number of patients who receive a  
108 PAN scan for trauma at our institution have had prior CT imaging.

109

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS.**

### **STUDY DESIGN**

This was a secondary analysis of data from a prospectively collected trauma registry followed by a review of corresponding electronic radiological records to evaluate the prevalence of prior imaging within our 6-hospital system.

### **SETTING**

The study was conducted at Christus Spohn Hospital/Corpus Christi - Memorial and five affiliated hospitals. Spohn Memorial is a major teaching affiliate of Texas A&M medical school, a level-two trauma center, and serves an inner-city population. The annual Emergency Department (ED) census is 45,000 patients. The six affiliated hospitals comprise 192,073 annual ED visits, which is 70.6% of all Emergency Department visits within our twelve-county region of southern Texas. The Christus Spohn Institutional Review Board approved the study prior to the initiation of data collection (IRB #13-021), and, due to the retrospective nature of the study/chart review, informed consent was waived.

### **POPULATION**

The study included all trauma registry patients who received a PAN scan during the period from January 1, 2012 through December 31, 2012. For inclusion into the trauma registry, the patient must undergo a traumatic event and be admitted to the hospital. We used a system-wide electronic medical record and electronic radiology files from our six affiliated hospitals to review the PAN scans and find evidence of prior CT imaging for all patients in the study group dating back to December 5, 2005.

134

135 **STATISTICAL ANALYSIS**

136 Patient data was recorded on a standardized data collection form and then entered into Excel for  
137 Windows (Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, WA). Subsequently, data was transported into SPSS  
138 software (IBM Corporation, Armonk, NY) for statistical analysis. Continuous data is presented as  
139 means +/- standard deviations and analyzed by t-tests; categorical data as frequency of occurrence  
140 and analyzed by chi-square. In addition, we calculated 95% CIs and odds ratios. Our primary  
141 outcome parameter was the percentage of patients in the trauma registry who were determined to  
142 have had a prior CT before their traumatic event. Secondary outcome parameters included identifying  
143 which types of CT scans patients with prior imaging history had received.

144



## RESULTS.

There were 867 patients admitted to the trauma service between January 1, 2012 and December 31, 2012. 460 (53%) received a PAN scan and were included in our study group (Table 1). The mean age of the study group was 37.7 +/- 1.54 years old, 24.8% were female, and the mean ISS score was 13.4 +/- 1.07. The ISS (injury severity score) of patients were observed as follows: ISS < 9, 36.5% (32.2-41.0%), ISS 9-16: 27.6% (23.7-31.9%) and ISS >16: 35.9% (31.6-40.3%). The mechanisms of injury included motor vehicle collision (47%), motorcycle collision (13.3%), fall from height (10.5%), and pedestrian struck by vehicle (10%).

65 (14%; 95% CI = 11-18%) of the patients had at least one prior CT imaging study. The most common prior studies performed were: CT head (47; 35-58%) which is, CT Face (30%; 21-38%) which is 1 mSv, and CT Abdomen and Pelvis (20%; 12-31%) which is 14 mSv . The estimated radiation exposure from these studies are: 2 mSv (millisieverts) 1 mSv, and 14 mSv respectively. [13] Of those with prior imaging, 34% had one previous scan, 30% had two previous scans, 30% had 3-6 scans, and 6% had 7 or more previous scans. One patient had 9 previous CT scans consisting of 5 previous abdominal/pelvis CTs, 2 chest CTs and 2 head CTs. We also examined prior imaging history for young adult patients (age  $\leq$  35 years; see Table 2) and found a similar prevalence of patients that had prior imaging (38.7%; 24-56%).

Table 3. summarizes several subgroup analyses that were performed to compare respective characteristics of patients that had a history of prior imaging. In terms of demographic features, there were no significant differences in terms of the percentage of males who had prior imaging vs. percentage of females who had prior imaging [13.9% vs 14.9%; OR 0.91 (0.50-0.78); p=0.92].

Likewise, we found that white and non-white victims of trauma were similar with respect to previous imaging exposure [12.2% vs. 15.1%; OR = .68 (0.38-1.16) p=0.19]. There was a trend toward older adult trauma patients (age > 55 years) having a higher prevalence of prior imaging versus other age groups, however, this difference was not statistically different (18.4% vs. 13.1%; OR 1.5; .77-2.8; p = 0.32). Finally, in terms of injury severity, we did not find that those with more significant injuries were more likely to have had prior CT studies. The average ISS was 12.3 for those with previous CT scans and 13.6 for the group with no previous scans (p = 0.40).

183

184 **DISCUSSION.**

185

186 The PAN CT scan is frequently utilized by physicians in the acute trauma setting based on concerns  
187 for occult injury, where mechanisms suggest high risk to body organs despite an absence of  
188 supporting examination findings. The study typically consists of a non-contrast CT of the Head and  
189 Cervical Spine, with an IV contrast CT scan of the Chest, Abdomen and Pelvis. The amount of  
190 radiation exposure during this series of CT scans varies from institution to institution, but on average it  
191 delivers 22-30 mSv (millisieverts) providing an unusually large radiation dose to patients [7].

192

193 Based on current knowledge of radiation exposure risk, investigators estimate that a 37-year-old male  
194 has a 1 in 477 chance of cancer in his life as a direct result of receiving a PAN scan alone [13, 14].

195 Increased utilization of the PAN scan is evident in most hospital systems. One study found an 8%  
196 increase in the number trauma patients receiving over 20 mSv of radiation (the recommended  
197 threshold yearly dose) after their institution implemented a PAN CT scan protocol [15].

198

199 Such risks must be weighed against evidence supporting the utility of the imaging study in the surgical  
200 literature. For example, Deunk et al. evaluated 106 consecutive blunt trauma patients retrospectively  
201 who received a PAN scan to assess the frequency of unexpected findings. An unexpected finding was  
202 defined as a positive traumatic injury identified on CT despite negative physical exam, FAST exam,  
203 and chest and pelvis x-rays respectively. Of note, 74% of the patients in the study had at least one  
204 unexpected finding on their CT scan and 49% of patients had a change in their treatment plan as a  
205 consequence of these findings [6].

206

207 In a larger series retrospective series, Self and Blake studied 457 trauma patients who had a closed  
208 head injury and underwent a PAN scan (CT brain, cervical spine, chest, abdomen and pelvis). Similar  
209 to the Deunk et al methods, if the patient had a no indications of injury prior to the PAN scan (normal  
210 physical exam, normal plain films and normal FAST scan), yet had any traumatic abnormality on the  
211 CT scan, it was deemed an unexpected finding. Within this database, Self and Blake reported  
212 unexpected findings in as high as 38% of cases with changes in management occurring in 26% based  
213 on the additional CT images that were obtained [5].

215 While the PAN CT appears to provide diagnostic benefit, its widespread use based on mechanism  
216 alone in the absence of clinically suggestive findings remains controversial. The use of this modality  
217 has been questioned from several standpoints beyond the concerns for radiation exposure previously  
218 noted. First, the study is expensive with charges to the patient running as high as \$17,000 by some  
219 accounts and as much as \$14,165 in our institution [8].

221 Second, it is unclear that growing use of CT for trauma has improved the diagnostic yield for life  
222 threatening conditions to a degree that warrants this utilization trend. Korley et al., performed a cross-  
223 sectional analysis of the National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey from 1998 – 2007 and  
224 found a 250% relative increase in the use of CT imaging during trauma during that timeframe.  
225 However, there was only a small concomitant increase in the detection of life threatening conditions  
226 from 1.7% to 2.0% [4].

228 Further contributing to the controversy, within the emergency medicine literature, Gupta et al., recently  
229 reported physician judgment as a reliable tool to identify low risk patients who would benefit from  
230 selective imaging [4]. In this prospective investigation, the authors evaluated 701 trauma patients who  
231 underwent a PAN scan. During study encounters, emergency physicians and surgeons were asked in  
232 advance to document those parts of the PAN scan they believed would show an abnormality. The

233 authors revealed that If the emergency physicians selectively ordered imaging according to clinical  
234 impression/examination, patients would have been exposed to 56% fewer CT scans. With respect to  
235 the CT scans felt to be unwarranted, 10% showed an abnormal finding, yet, only 0.3% of those  
236 required a critical action. Thus, strictly using emergency physician judgment as a test within the  
237 investigation, the negative likelihood ratio of a CT scan resulting in a critical action was 0.05. [8]

239 Both acknowledged by the Gupta et al. study authors and our current investigation partners,  
240 respectively, emergency physicians and trauma surgeons have different comfort levels in terms of  
241 defining clinically significant CT findings and acceptable miss rates for actionable injuries. Trauma  
242 surgeons consistently express a preference for broad use of PAN scan with resultant lower levels of  
243 unrecognized injuries as compared to emergency physicians who seemingly favor selective imaging  
244 and might tolerate a higher false negative rate from acting on clinical impression alone. While we  
245 don't expect this controversy to be settled without extensive additional research, we believe that both  
246 specialties could agree that in selected lower risk trauma patients there is an opportunity to assess  
247 prior imaging exposure and to discuss the risk:benefit profile with patients prior to PAN scanning i.e.  
248 an opportunity to empower patients to participate in decisions that balance risk of radiation exposure  
249 long-term versus short-term risks of missed significant injury.

251 Supporting this viewpoint, we present results here that generally confirm our pre-study  
252 hypothesis/concern that a significant number of patients admitted to the trauma service following PAN  
253 scan had past CT imaging within our six-hospital system antecedent to their acute injury. Within the  
254 460 patient study group, 65 patients (14%; 95% CI = 11-18%) had at least one prior CT imaging  
255 study. This number represents nearly 1 in 7 patients admitted to our trauma service. Furthermore, for  
256 those with prior imaging, 43 (66%; 53-77%) had more than one imaging study done previously.

258 Unfortunately, there is little evidence that physicians in the acute setting discuss radiation risk with  
259 their patients to any significant extent. Zwank et al. surveyed 200 stable emergency department  
260 patients undergoing CT scan about their awareness of radiation risks from CT scans and also inquired  
261 as to whether or not their medical provider discussed the risks of radiation exposure that context. They  
262 found 25% of patients were aware a CT scan can increase one's overall lifetime risk of cancer, but  
263 only 14.5% of medical providers discussed the risk of radiation prior to the patient receiving a CT scan  
264 [12].

266 Anecdotally, and more specific to the setting of trauma, we have not seen prior CT imaging history  
267 routinely taken by physicians as a component of initial patient history at any institution in our collective  
268 experiences. Further, our Medline search did not reveal prior studies investigating this particular area  
269 of concern. With federal regulatory bodies (i.e. FDA, CMS) gradually heading toward cooperative  
270 analysis and enforcement of standards to reduce patient exposure to radiation from medical imaging,  
271 it would seemingly make sense for clinicians at point of care to proactively address the issue through  
272 patient education and participation in imaging decision making [16]. Furthermore, as trauma is an  
273 unpredictable event in a patient's future, our study also serves to remind physicians to be selective in  
274 their use of imaging modalities with ionizing radiation for elective concerns when alternatives such as  
275 MRI and ultrasound may suffice.

276

277

278 **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS.**

279

280 Our study has several limitations warranting discussion, particularly with respect to the potential to  
281 underestimate the prevalence and frequency of prior CT imaging exposure for trauma patients. For  
282 example, our patients could have undergone imaging at other non-affiliated area and/or distant  
283 hospitals during the look back period of 7 years. We expect the regional scope of our 6-hospital  
284 system limited this possibility, as over 70% of all ED visits within a broad geographic region are  
285 represented within this system. Similarly, we also likely underestimated prior imaging history since we  
286 were unable to review radiology records dating prior to 2005. Especially in younger patients, remote  
287 history of radiation exposure remains relevant to their long-term risk of malignancy. While a fully  
288 prospective study might have allowed for surveying individual patients about prior imaging history,  
289 such a method might have introduced recollection bias. Likewise, it does not seem easily feasible to  
290 conduct a multicenter study of non-academic, non-affiliated community hospitals to directly review all  
291 radiological records such that all centers in the region would be represented.

292

293 Importantly, the inclusion criteria limited our study group to only those patients admitted to the hospital  
294 after receiving their PAN scan i.e. those patients with identified injuries or persistent concern for  
295 unrecognized injury following CT. Undoubtedly, the majority of PAN CTs within this group were  
296 unavoidable based on clinical suspicion for serious injury and/or distracting injuries that would prevent  
297 the clinician from choosing selective imaging. This limitation specifically excluded a large number of  
298 individuals seen the Emergency Department for trauma of lower potential acuity who receive a PAN  
299 scan and were discharged home. Future studies should focus on this latter group of lower acuity  
300 trauma patients for whom discussion of the risk of radiation exposure long-term vs. benefits of CT to

301 avoid missed acute injury may be more balanced.

302

303 In view of the aforementioned limitations, we emphasize that our results provide only a lower limit of  
304 certainty as to the prior imaging history of our trauma patients who undergo PAN scan. The  
305 prevalence of patients receiving prior CT imaging is certainly higher. However, we believe the 14%  
306 prior CT imaging history is alarming even before we take into account the likelihood our method  
307 underestimates the risk of prior exposure.

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309



310

311 **CONCLUSIONS**

312

313 Within our trauma registry, 14% of patients had prior CT imaging within our hospital system before  
314 their traumatic event and PAN scan. As serial CTs incrementally increase the lifetime chance of  
315 malignancy, this risk should be weighed against evidence supporting the utility of the Pan CT in the primary  
316 evaluation of trauma patients.

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377

## **Table 1**(on next page)

Study Group Characteristics

### **Table 1 - Study Group Characteristics**

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**Table 1. Study Group Characteristics**

Category	Study Group Information (N = 460)
Mean Age	37.7 (sd=16.8)
Mean ISS Score	13.4 (sd=11.7)
Female Gender	114 (24.8%)
Male Gender	346 (75.2%)
Motor Vehicle Collision	216 (47%)
Motorcycle Collision	61 (13.3%)
Fall From Height	48 (10.5%)
Pedestrian Struck by a Vehicle	46 (10%)

## **Table 2**(on next page)

Prior Imaging in Young Adults

### **Table 2 - Prior CT Imaging in Adults < 35 Years of Age (N =243)**

2 **TABLE 2. Prior CT Imaging in Adults  $\leq 35$  Years of Age (N =243)**

Mean Age:	24.4(SD=5.6)
Female:	60 (24.7%)
Mean ISS score:	12.8(SD=11.8)
Mechanism Injury:	
MVC	137 (56.4%)
Motorcycle	25 (10.3%)
Fall from Height	15 (7.2%)
Pedestrian Struck	19 (7.8%)
Received Previous CT scans	n=31
1 Prior CT scan:	12 (38.7%; 24-56%)
2 prior CT scans:	10 (32.3%; 18-50%)
3-6 Prior Scans	7 (22.6%; 11-40%)
$\geq 7$ Prior scans	1 (3.2%; 0-17%)
Common prior Studies	
CT Head	11 (35.5%; 21-35%)
CT Face	10 (32.3%; 18-50%)
CT Abdomen Pelvis	9 (29.0%; 16-47%)

4



## **Table 3**(on next page)

Characteristics of Patients with Prior Imaging

### **Table 3 - Characteristics of Patients with Prior Imaging**

2

3 **Table 3. Characteristics of Patients with Prior Imaging**

SUBJECT	PRIOR IMAGING	NO-PRIOR IMAGING	OR (95% CI)	P-Value
% male patients vs % female patients	13.8% 14.9%	86.2% 85.1%	0.91 (0.50 - 0.78)	0.92
% age < 55 vs % age > 55	13.1% 18.4%	86.9% 81.6%	1.5 (.77 - 2.8)	0.32
% ISS < 9 vs % ISS > 9	14.3% 27.7%	85.7% 72.3%	1.1 (0.64 - 1.9)	0.84
% Whites vs % Non-Whites	12.2% 15.1%	87.8% 84.9%	0.68 (0.38 - 1.16)	0.19

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