

Columbus Radiology's road from A to A+ in turnaround time performance

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Although performance metrics have always been important in radiology, our conversations with imaging leaders are revealing an increased emphasis on benchmarking performance for two important reasons.

First, reimbursement models are moving from fee-for-service to rewarding demonstrated performance. Second, performance metrics offer a mechanism for hospital and radiology groups to improve alignment. Unlike some specialties with clear clinical outcomes, radiology has had to identify performance metrics to serve as a proxy measure of quality. This is part of why imaging turnaround times (TAT) are, and will continue to be one of the more important metrics of facility and physician performance.

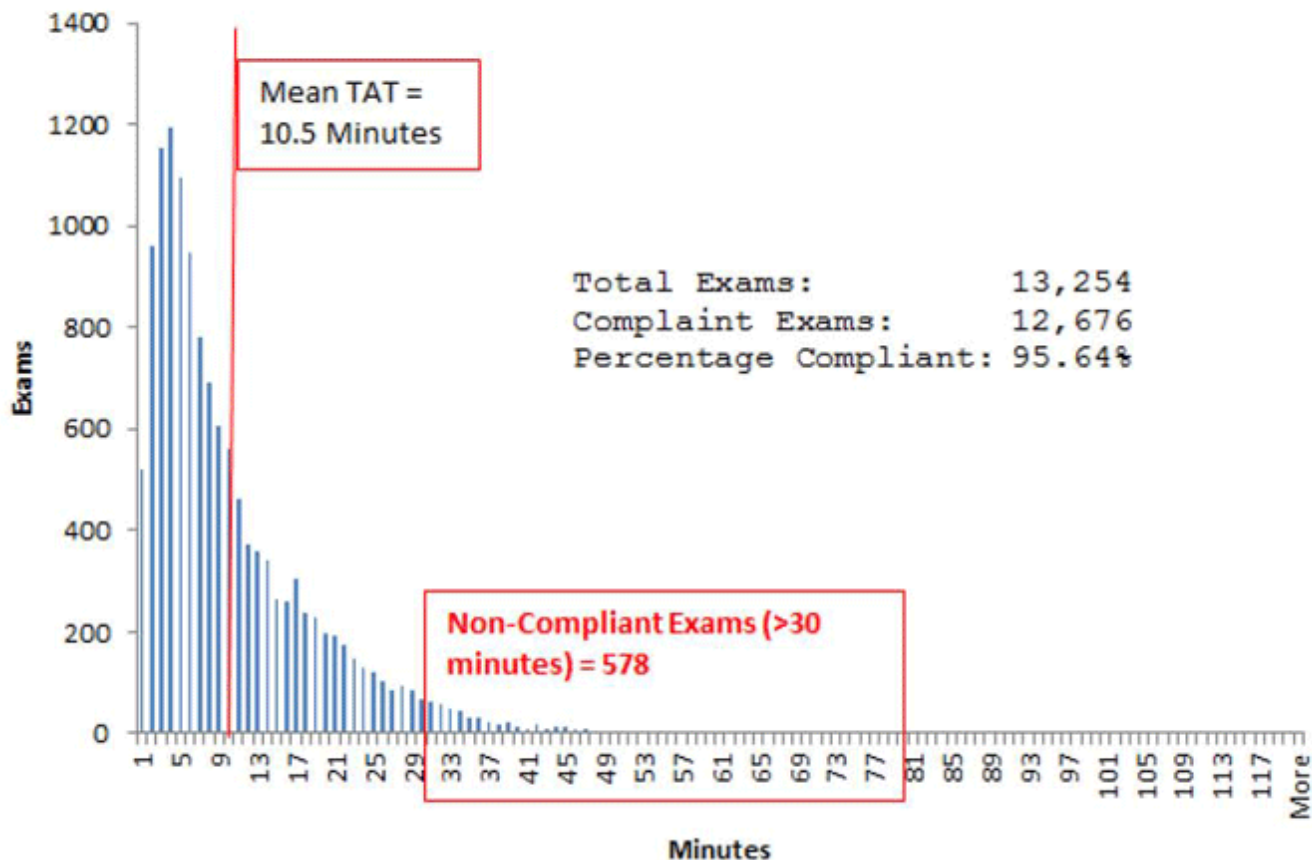
Since TAT continues to be one of the most important metrics in imaging, we just completed our 2016 Imaging Turnaround Times Survey to provide our members with [refreshed data on national performance](#) for both order and report turnaround time. In advance of the release of our new data, we wanted to share the story of how Columbus Radiology used our [2013 TAT data](#) and an IT solution to elevate the level of care they provide to their hospital partners and patients.

Columbus moves from measuring average performance to guaranteed results

Like many imaging providers, Columbus Radiology had traditionally measured TAT in time from scan complete to final report, based on its average or median performance. A routine review of its data showed that although its average TAT across all care settings placed the organization between the 75th and 90th percentile and contractual obligations were met, there were still many exams that fell outside of the goals

Columbus and its hospital partners set.

October ER Interpretation Time Histogram



After reviewing this data, Columbus' leadership made the commitment to guarantee to hospital partners that its radiologists would hit their agreed upon TAT goals at least 95% of the time. This decision was made to ensure that Columbus was consistently delivering the high quality patient care and service on which it prides itself.

Columbus Radiology's CEO, Charles McRae, credits success in meeting these new standards to two factors. First, the increased scrutiny of having to meet these targets has led the practice to find innovative ways to reduce variability (such as image batching by technologists). Second, Columbus uses a unified worklist that not only allows its radiologists to easily read across its partner's disparate PACS systems, but also prioritizes STAT exams to ensure that Columbus meets its targets. McRae notes that sometimes this means triaging routine exams.

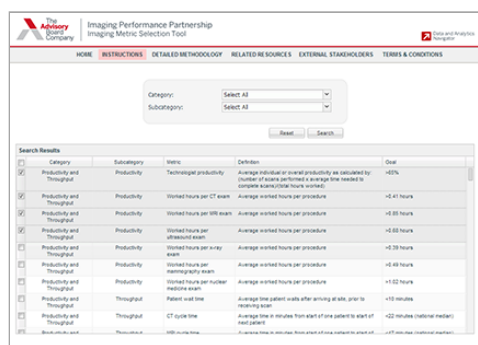
We can see in the graph above that Columbus is able to meet its aggressive ER goal of 95% of scans read in <30 minutes and improve performance above the 95th percentile of surveyed participants.

Make the most of your imaging benchmarks

Columbus’s story provides a new way to think about and measure turnaround time performance and illustrates important lessons that we can apply to all imaging benchmarks, not just TAT. Below are six considerations for metric selection:

Consideration	Rationale	Action
1. Select dependable metrics	Data for desired metrics should be reliable and easily available	Eliminate metrics not easily accessible or supported by trustworthy data
2. Avoid “stale” metrics	A fresh look at common measures helps surface underlying problems	Pressure test conventional metrics to elicit more specific definitions
3. Measure customer concerns	Satisfaction of referring physicians and patients, key to maintaining customer base	Include metrics that track referral activity, patient experience
4. Map to organizational strategy	Ensures that a portion of the dashboard reflects larger organizational goals	Include metrics that directly measure department contribution to institution’s strategic objectives
5. Account for department-specific imperatives	Increased focus on immediate challenges facing the department helps improve performance	Add metrics that measure progress on pressing yet temporary areas of concern
6. Ensure strategic balance	Equitable distribution across key metric categories ensures dashboard not over-invested in any single area	Force trade-offs in over-represented areas

Build your next imaging dashboard—in 10 minutes



Create a customized performance dashboard with the quality, efficiency, and finance metrics that are most relevant to your imaging program.

BUILD YOUR DASHBOARD