Opportunities and strategies to drive appropriate use of MRI in Austria

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Authors' objectives
Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is an essential component of medical care: it plays a vital role not only in diagnosis of diseases and injuries, but also in the monitoring of disease progression and treatment success. Currently, however, the appropriateness of diagnostic imaging is increasingly debated. In a recent publication of 26 low-value medical procedures, 12 involved medical imaging among several categories: diagnostic, preventive and preoperative testing [1]. With more than 100 MRI exams yearly per 1,000 population, Austria is leading in MRI utilisation in comparison to other OECD countries. A useful investigation is one in which the result – positive or negative – will contribute to diagnosis and will alter patient management. Inappropriate use may lead to costs without increasing diagnostic yields: not only the cost of the exams itself, but also ensuing treatment or follow-up costs, increase in waiting times and additional costs if patients are on sick leave [2]. Our aim was therefore to identify recommendations against the use of MRI and interventions to decrease inappropriate imaging relevant to the Austrian context.

Authors' conclusions
The Austrian referral guidelines are widely accepted – we would advocate for an elaboration of these guidelines to allow referrers to better differentiate appropriate and inappropriate indications. Referrers should receive training and tools to consult patients on risks of inappropriate imaging. Radiologists should be more involved in decision making: as a minimum through consulting service lines or by integration of their expertise in alternative pre-authorisation models.

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