Daily routine chest radiographs largely affect clinical decisions about short-term patients’ care in an ICU. Chest radiography can be used to confirm other assessments and to plan appropriate care, and critical care nurses are often the first to view chest radiographs. The author presents information that nurses can use to interpret chest radiographs, including basic chest radiography, relevant anatomy and physiology, normal findings, and radiographic findings in common pulmonary and cardiac disorders.

In acute care settings, basic chest radiology is still used to quickly detect abnormalities in the chest, and chest imaging is an important tool in managing critically ill patients. In a recent study, Marik and Janower concluded that daily routine chest radiographs affected clinical decisions about patients’ care for a large percentage of short-term patients in an intensive care unit (ICU). However,...

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Chest radiography is the primary imaging modality used in the intensive care unit (ICU), given its portability, rapid image acquisition, and immediate bedside return of information on the preview screen. Of consequence, it is of utmost importance that both radiologists and intensivists are adept in reading these studies. Portable ICU radiographs are obtained in an anteroposterior (AP) view in which the x-ray beam traverses the patient anterior to posterior at a standard distance of 40 inches, compared with 72 inches for a posteroanterior (PA) view. This decreased distance contributes to greater...