Distal forearm fractures can be reliably diagnosed using ultrasound.


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Forearm fractures are so common that any improvement (however small) in the patient pathway will be likely to tangibly improve outcomes. This was a thorough systematic review of papers going back to the 1940s and including 4 different languages with 2 reviewers (so we can probably forgive them that there was no independent arbitration of areas of disagreement between them). The results should make all Emergency Departments sit up and take note – ultrasound is a reliable tool to diagnose forearm fractures. For ultrasound aficionados it will be pleasing to see this work is supported by some very recent prospective evidence (Rowlands 2016).

It is in the area of how, and who, to train where we need more information. Only 2 studies looked an inter-rater reliability (key to ensuring to engagement and implementation) and the training interventions differed quite markedly between studies. It is interesting that outcomes appeared not be different between those who received training and those who didn’t. While this seems implausible, and probably does need to be the subject of an Educational Randomised Control Trial, the strength of evidence would suggest ultrasound is relatively easy. As bones break in different ways as you age so care is needed specifically needed in the adult group but it is beholden on the paediatric emergency medicine care community to look at their practice and consider evaluating an intervention that is likely to improve the patient experience.


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