Introduction
With respect to medical decision making about imaging techniques, the situation might be different from country to country when considering the patient’s mental welfare and the availability of imaging techniques.

Mental welfare
In general the development of all imaging techniques aims at reducing the risks for the patient. The radiation dose, for example, is made as low as possible. However, the stress of such an examination stays. Images are made when there is something seriously wrong with the patient. An X-ray in case of a bone fracture will not bring stress, but a CT scan or a PET scan to detect tumours or to check the growth of those will bring serious stress and are a psychological burden for the patient. Next to that, some of the imaging devices are very big and might look threatening. The patient will have to lie in a narrow tube for some time, alone in the examining room and surrounded by lots of noise coming out of the device. So, the way in which the patient is being informed about what is going to happen, is being prepared for and guided through the examination by the medical staff are very important factors influencing the patient’s mental welfare. Physicians, nurses and specialized staff must be rather well trained for carrying out this task. The quality of this training might differ from country to country.

Availability
In countries with a good public system of health care the different imaging techniques will be available in most of the hospitals. Still there might be a waiting list for some of the devices. If everybody has the same rights regarding access to good health care, he or she has to wait for his or her turn – whether rich or poor. But if you are a very important man or woman in sports or a manager in a big company or a well-known politician there may be an exception to this rule of equality. Another development in most countries is the emergence of private clinics. There the rule is: pay and you will be treated. And furthermore, patients can travel to other countries where treatment is immediately available. The situation regarding access to the different imaging techniques also might differ from one country to another.

Hospital visit
Make an appointment at the local hospital for a small group out of your class (a delegation) or ask a member of the medical staff to come to your class. Prepare this hospital visit with the whole class by drawing up a number of questions you would like to have answered about:

• The way in which the medical staff at the local hospital is trained and acts to make the psychological burden and the stress for the patient as small as possible
• The availability of the five imaging techniques and the costs of using it at the local hospital or in your country at large
• The exceptions to ‘the rule of equality’ and the reasons the local hospital has for such a policy.

In the case of a small group going out to the local hospital, the selected delegates will eventually have to present their findings to the whole class in a well-structured and comprehensible way.