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Press Release 2012/10

IAEA Patient Protection Effort Reaches Key Milestone

20 April 2012 | An International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) effort to help people track their radiation exposure from medical procedures achieved a significant milestone this week. The Agency received the final approval from a group of medical oversight organizations for the "Joint Position Statement on the IAEA Patient Radiation Exposure Tracking", a set of principles to guide patient protection efforts at the sub-national, national, and international level.

The joint statement endorses the IAEA's three-year-old Smart Card/SmartRadTrack project, which aims to help nations develop systems to track medical radiation procedures and radiation doses. The statement has been agreed by the World Health Organization (WHO), the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the European Society of Radiology (ESR), the International Organization for Medical Physics (IOMP), the International Society of Radiographers and Radiological Technologists (ISRRT), and the Conference of Radiation Control Program Directors, USA (CRCPD).

"This system is critical if the medical community is going to keep patients safe when they are being referred for more and more diagnostic scans. These scans, over the years, are made using more and more powerful machines," said Madan Rehani, Radiation Safety Specialist in the IAEA's Radiation Protection of Patients Unit. "The tracking system will draw doctors' attention to previous radiological examinations, both in terms of clinical information and radiation dose and thus help them assess whether the 11th or 20th CT scan is really appropriate, whether it will do more good than harm."

Advances in radiation-based diagnostic technologies, such as the CT scan, have led to patients receiving such procedures more frequently. The convenience of CT with the added advantage of increased information has resulted in increased usage to the point that there are instances of patients getting tens of CT scans in a few years, not all of which may be justified, or getting CT scans when it can be avoided. An increasing number of infants and children are also getting repeated CT scans. In most cases, the medical benefits still outweigh the harm, but there is growing concern about unjustified CT scans with increased cumulative doses to patients that could be detrimental.

The IAEA held its first Smart Card development meeting in 2009. Additional sessions in 2010 and 2012 led to the final draft of the Joint Position Statement, which outlines a number of major goals:

1. Supporting accountability for patient safety;
2. Strengthening of the process of justification (e.g. information available at the point-of-care for the referring practitioner);
3. Supporting optimization (e.g. use of diagnostic reference levels (DRLs));
4. Providing information for assessment of radiation risks; and
5. Establishing a tool for use in research and epidemiology.

Background

- » [IAEA Smart Card/SmartRadTrack Project](#)
- » [Joint Position Statement](#)

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