

March 3, 2009 McLean VA: People Exposed to More Radiation from Medical Exams

With their release of a new report titled *Ionizing Radiation Exposure of the Population of the United States* (Report No. 160, 2009), the National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurements (NCRP) shares information about the increase in average medical radiation doses received by members of the public. Their information, collected and verified by experts across the United States, tells a story of our increasing use of technology to enhance our lives. “Based upon an evaluation of the peer-reviewed literature that details the improvements brought about by such technologies...it is reasonable to conclude that millions of lives have been saved and millions more dramatically improved as a result of these imaging technologies.” (MITA 2007a)

Technological advances and innovations in medicine have produced significant benefits for society noted by healthier, longer lives (MITA 2007a). Early disease diagnosis and some disease treatments involve imaging exams that expose us to radiation. With radiation, physicians have the capability to see inside the human body, see if any organ is not functioning properly, determine if a growth is cancer, treat disease, and look to see if our disease is gone after treatment. Timely detection and treatment of disease is critical to improving outcomes.

As with any medical imaging procedure, individuals need to discuss with their physician the need for the procedure and the potential benefit of having it performed. Imaging procedures must be justified based on a need for information to improve the patient’s health condition. Self-referral for an imaging exam is discouraged and the use of some imaging modalities in healthy individuals is opposed (http://hps.org/documents/ctscreening_ps018-0.pdf).

The Health Physics Society, a professional society of radiation safety professionals including those who work in the medical field, applaud the NCRP on putting together such a comprehensive report of doses to the population of the United States. On the Society’s Web site (<http://hps.org/media/pressreleases.html>), we are offering additional information about the medical radiation dose chapter of the NCRP report for further consideration and better understanding of the data presented.

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