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Joint Commission Publishes Radiation Safety Recommendations

The Joint Commission has published a report that delivers information to healthcare providers regarding the provision of radiation-involved imaging services, cautioning against high dosages, which increase the risk for long-term damage. The report states that "Over the past two decades, the U.S. population's total exposure to ionising radiation has nearly doubled. If a patient receives repeated doses, harm can also occur due to the cumulative effect of those multiple doses over time". Conversely, using insufficient radiation may increase the risk of misdiagnosis, delayed treatment, or, if the initial test is inadequate, repeat testing with the attendant exposure to even more radiation. The risks associated with the use of ionising radiation in diagnostic imaging include cancer, burns and other injuries.

Furthermore, x-rays are officially classified as a carcinogen by the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

The report details that from the 72 million CT (computerised tomography) scans performed in the U.S. during 2007, one study estimated that 29,000 future cancers and 14,500 future deaths could develop due to radiation (cancer incidence = 0.04 percent). Another study estimates the incidence of cancer related to CT radiation at 0.02 to 0.04 percent. While these studies' conclusions rely upon some currently unverified scientific assumptions – namely, a linear relationship between radiation dose and risk even at very low exposures – they do highlight the need to maintain radiation doses as low as reasonably achievable when obtaining needed diagnostic information.

Although experts disagree on the extent of the risks of cancer from diagnostic imaging, there is agreement that care should be taken to weigh the medical necessity of a given level of radiation exposure against the risks, and that steps should be taken to eliminate avoidable exposure to radiation.

The full report is available at: http://www.jointcommission.org/assets/1/18/SEA_471.PDF

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