

NCRP Executive Director, David A. Schauer, Participated in a WHO Global Initiative on “Radiation Safety in Health Care Settings”

*The **appropriate use of radiation in medicine** is a primary focus of the National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurements.*

Due to the extensive use of ionizing radiation in health-care settings, radiation safety in medicine is a **public health issue** impacting patients, health-care providers and the public. It is estimated that 426 million radiographic and nuclear medicine procedures are performed annually in the United States.

On June 26 and 27, 2008, the World Health Organization (WHO) convened a panel of experts from 20 countries* to determine priority needs for ensuring radiation safety in health-care settings and the expected role of WHO to assist countries in meeting those needs. NCRP’s Executive Director, Dr. David A. Schauer, summarized preliminary findings related to medical exposure of the U.S. population, and he served as rapporteur for the meeting. Representatives from Belgium, Japan, Sweden and the United States reported that ~20 to 50 % of diagnostic imaging procedures performed in those countries are not medically “justified” (*i.e.*, they do not meet the relevant referral guidelines or appropriateness criteria).

The panelists identified numerous cross-cutting issues related to diagnostic radiology, nuclear medicine, image-guided interventional medical procedures, and radiation therapy. The role of **justification** in ensuring appropriate use of diagnostic medical imaging procedures that expose patients, providers and the public to ionizing radiation was identified as the top-priority issue. Referral guidelines or appropriateness criteria are intended to guide radiologists, referring physicians, and patients in making initial decisions about diagnostic imaging and therapeutic techniques. These are routinely used in some countries resulting in reduced exposures and costs to the health-care system. Current Medicare legislation under consideration in the U.S. Congress includes a pilot study involving the use of appropriateness criteria in imaging. This type of approach is necessary to ensure the appropriate use of radiation in medicine and to promote the radiation safety culture in health-care settings to protect patients, health-care providers, and the public.

A technical meeting will be held in the fall of 2008 to develop a comprehensive strategy and to issue WHO guidelines related to the appropriate use of radiation in medicine.

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*Representatives were from Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Czech Republic, China, Finland, Argentina, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Japan, Norway, Qatar, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and United States.