WHO Global Initiative on Radiation Safety in Health Care Settings

Poster No.: ESI-0057
Congress: EuroSafe Imaging 2017
Type: EuroSafe Imaging
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Keywords: Action 12 - Cooperation with international radiation protection initiatives and other stakeholders including IAEA, WHO, ICRP, HERCA, European Commission, Action 11 - Improved patient communication, Radioprotection / Radiation dose, Pelvis, CT, Audit and standards, Quality assurance
DOI: 10.1594/esi2017/ESI-0057

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The World Health Organization (WHO) is the coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system. It has a decentralized structure with offices in 150 of its 194 Member States, six regional offices and its headquarters in Geneva. WHO's objective is the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health, defined as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" [WHO 1948]. Health is a human right that people rate as one of their highest priorities. The right to health includes access to timely, acceptable, and affordable health care of appropriate quality. Good health services are those which deliver safe and effective health interventions to those that need them, when and where needed, with minimum waste of resources [WHO 2007]; therefore, the safe and appropriate use of radiation in medicine is embedded in the concept of good medical practice.
Description of activity and work performed

WHO’s Radiation Programme is aimed to protect patients, workers and public under planned, existing and emergency exposure situations. Under this programme, WHO is conducting a Global Initiative on Radiation Safety in Health Care Settings (RSHCS) to mobilize the health sector to maximize the benefits of the use of radiation in medicine, with the least possible level of risk [Perez, 2015]. This initiative, which includes activities in the area of risk assessment, management and communication, seeks to integrate radiation safety into the concept of good medical practice. It brings together relevant stakeholders in concerted action to enhance the application of radiation safety standards in healthcare settings [BSS, 2014]. The initiative is currently focused on promoting the ten priority actions identified in the "Bonn Call for Action" (BCfA) to enhance radiation protection in medicine [IAEA & WHO 2014]. A summary of some WHO activities related to the BCfA is provided below.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<td>1. Enhance the implementation of the principle of justification</td>
<td>WHO collaboration with the IAEA, HERCA, ISR, WONCA and other key stakeholders to support the adoption, adaptation, implementation and use of clinical imaging guidelines (CIGs) in different regions (e.g. joint workshops, guidance, training). WHO project on justification of medical imaging of asymptomatic people for individual health assessment-IHA (expert consultation in 2014, international workshop and peer reviewed paper in 2016, policy guidance document during 2017-2018).</td>
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<td>2. Enhance the implementation of the principle of optimization of protection and safety</td>
<td>WHO contribution to IAEA, EC and ICRP projects/activities on dose reduction techniques, patient dose recording, establishment of DRLs &amp; PiDRLs, WHO advocacy among health authorities (e.g. side event &quot;Imaging for saving kids&quot; at the World Health Assembly).</td>
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<td>3. Strengthen manufacturers’ role in contributing to the overall safety regime</td>
<td>WHO official relations with Global Diagnostic imaging, healthcare, IT and radiation Therapy Trade Association</td>
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4. Strengthen radiation protection education and training of health professionals

Focus on education and training of referrers: training materials on justification for referring physicians, special sessions in meetings of paediatrics societies, workshops for family physicians (e.g. WONCA conferences).

5. Shape and promote a strategic research agenda (SRA) for radiation protection in medicine

Two of the six WHO core functions are research-related i.e. "articulating ethical and evidence-based policy options" and "shaping the research agenda and stimulating the generation, translation and dissemination of valuable knowledge. WHO provides input to initiatives related to medical RP research priority setting and promotes the implementation of SRAs in this field (e.g. cooperation with EC on MELODI and EURAMED).

6. Increase availability of improved global information on medical exposures and occupational exposures in medicine

Arrangement for cooperation between UNSCEAR and WHO for cooperation on periodic collection and exchange of relevant data on global and regional uses of ionizing radiation in medicine (collaboration on the UNSCEAR Global Survey on medical exposures and occupational exposures of health workers).

7. Improve prevention of medical radiation incidents and accidents

Foster integration of radiation safety reporting systems (e.g. SAFRON, SAFRAN) into the existing reporting and learning systems in health care (e.g. injection safety, haemovigilance, pharmacovigilance, medical device vigilance, others); harmonization of common principles, standards, classifications, definitions and tools across disciplines and countries.

8. Strengthen radiation safety culture in health care

WHO-IRPA-IOMP project for the development of a document providing a framework for the establishment and
9. Foster an improved radiation benefit-risk-dialogue

Project on radiation risk communication in health care to provide information, guidance and tools to support healthcare discussions about benefit and risk. Tool published in 2016 [WHO, 2016], currently working on derivative products (e.g. leaflet for patients/parents, risk communication training package for health professionals).

10. Strengthen the implementation of safety requirements globally

WHO is one of the eight international organizations which adopted the new BSS, and is currently cooperating with the IAEA and the other cosponsors to support BSS implementation (e.g. joint organization of regional/national BSS workshops, factsheets, joint development of the safety guide on RP in medicine).
Conclusion and Recommendations

Improving health care services requires a multi-sectoral approach and multi-disciplinary partnership with a range of stakeholders. The WHO Global Initiative on RSHCS provides a platform to support and strengthen such global partnership and collaboration. Despite the difference between countries and regions in terms of levels of development and socio-economic conditions, the highest standards of quality and safety in health care remain as the benchmark for all countries. Over the past decade, a number of campaigns have been launched at continental, regional and national levels to promote radiation safety in medicine. Those campaigns, currently facilitated by the International Society of Radiology (ISR), can be a powerful catalyst for mobilizing other regions in the same direction, as EuroSafe Imaging has already proved to be. Global partnership should continue expanding and more efforts should be made to integrate radiation safety into existing health care delivery policies, strategies and regulations.
Personal/Organisational information

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References


IAEA & WHO 2014 Bonn Call for Action - 10 Actions to Improve Radiation Protection


