ESR launches EuroSafe Imaging campaign to address challenges of radiation protection

Patients undergoing x-ray and CT examinations will probably never know it, but 2014 looks set to be a critically important year for making the whole process safer because the ESR has chosen ECR 2014 to start the EuroSafe Imaging campaign.

Just as the launch of Image Gently in January 2008 has educated both imaging and healthcare professionals worldwide about the need to minimize radiation dose exposure to children, the ESR’s new initiative is also expected to have a significant impact, given the society’s global reach and membership base.

This new initiative – as well as the accompanying activities of Image Gently of the American College of Radiology (ACR)/KSNIA Image Wisely, and other radiation safety campaigns in the UK – will be discussed at this ECR Radiation Protection Sessions. Dr. Madan Rehani, the ESR’s director of radiation protection, will be joined by three leading advocates of radiation protection for a highly informative session on how radiologists, radiographers, and medical physicists are making imaging safer for their patients.

“Europe has a great tradition of placing much importance upon medical radiation protection,” Rehani said. “However, for each new generation, each generation older, the introduction of the CT increases the risk of harmful exposure. While someone of my age may only have seen four medical imaging exams in their lifetime, a child today may have a dozen or more. In 2000, when I joined the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as a Radiation Safety Specialist, there was not much discussion about this subject except with respect to protecting staff (e.g. radiologists and radiology department staff) from exposure to radiation. Now the focus is predominantly on the patient.”

The objectives of the EuroSafe Imaging campaign are to promote appropriateness in radiological imaging to maintain radiation doses within diagnostic reference levels (DRLs) to use the ALARA (as low as reasonably achievable) principle to further reduce doses without compromising clinical image quality. “The campaign will also join forces with national radiological societies, subspecialties societies, related medical professions, international organisations, industry and utilise social media effectively,” he explained.

To be supported by a major media campaign, a variety of outreach programs, and a dedicated website, EuroSafe Imaging is a large scale project to develop EuroSafe Imaging guidelines, web-based clinical decision support (CDS) systems, and a European Commission Tender project to provide European DRLs for radiation protection.

“Dealing with the challenges of radiation protection is one of the most important activities of the EuroSafe Imaging group is being established. Both this group and the ESR will be lobbying for funding of medical radiation protection activities,” Rehani noted.

This campaign is building upon excellent projects supported by the European Commission which have produced valuable results. The ESR itself has been involved in a number of projects on medical radiation protection. The goal is to consolidate these efforts and create robust new content, and increase visibility throughout Europe. One of the most important aspects of the campaign is to show how much we have achieved in terms of patient protection, it’s a ‘what we have done and achieved in Europe and what we can do to focus,’” Rehani added.

One of its projects is to implement a European Commission Tender project to provide European DRLs for children and to promote their use. The project will be undertaken by a consortium that includes the European Society of Paediatric Radiology, one of more than 75 members of the Alliance for Radiation in Fidi

Prof. Marilyn J. Goske from Cincinnati, Ohio, is one of the leaders of the Image Gently campaign.

In her talk, she intends to provide an update on the Image Gently campaign. In particular, she will discuss the need for diagnostic reference levels in paediatric radiology, and the importance of educating parents about what they need to do and to ask in this digital age. Unlike several generations ago, today children now have the unique opportunity of having all of the imaging exams and reports of their lifetime consolidated electronically. “Young parents especially have become social media astute. Our social media efforts can make them knowledgeable about how they can keep track of the radiation exposure of their children and also ask if a non-radiation exam can be used,” she added.

Social media is also at the heart of the Image Wisely campaign, which will be discussed by Dr. James A. Brink, radiologist-in-chief of Massachusetts General Hospital and professor of radiology at Harvard Medical School. Image Wisely launched at the RSNA 2010 annual meeting by the ACR and the RSNA is a predominantly North American focused campaign but with a global message. It’s goal is to encourage radiology professionals to take personal responsibility for keeping patients safe from inappropriate and excessive exposure to radiation dose.

One recent development that Brink plans to discuss is the series of radiation safety cases being developed. Each year, Image Wisely develops six radiation safety cases. These allow radiologists, radiographers, and medical physicists to assess their own understanding of important radiation safety concepts such as radiation dose monitoring and interventions. He’ll also update session attendees on other developments, including: how Image Wisely plans to work with and support the ECR and its EuroSafe Imaging campaign.

Dr. James A. Brink from Boston is one of the Image Wisely campaign task force members.

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BY CYNTHIA E. KEEN

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