Do Good Without Causing Undue Harm

Experts Tackle Patient Radiation Safety During IAEA's Scientific Forum

Worldwide, about four billion X-ray exams, 35 million nuclear medicine exams and eight million radiation therapy treatment courses are undertaken each year. With millions exposed to ionizing radiation for medical purposes, and developing countries acquiring more machines to treat and diagnose cancer, the safety of patients is an ever-increasing concern.

During the IAEA´s *Scientific Forum*, cancer experts and regulators put their heads together to explore the problems and possible solutions relating to the safe and appropriate use of new radiation medicine technology in developed and developing countries.

Pierre Scalliet, Chairman of the Department of Radiation Oncology at the Cancer Center of the St. Luc University Hospital in Belgium, said the vast majority of accidents are caused by lack of training and safety culture, not by faulty equipment or lack of the right equipment.

Agnés Buzyn, a nuclear regulator who is Chairperson of the Board of Directors of Institut de Radioprotection et de Sûreté Nucléaire in France, agreed that staff training and a culture where safety is valued are at least as important as effective regulation and safety standards.

She proposed that professional societies, manufacturers, patients and governments should all be involved in radiation safety: from staff training to improving patient awareness.

Panellists and experts from the audience then went on to discuss ways to ensure that doctors, physicists and the medical facilities they work for adhere to safety regulations. Although it was generally agreed that the differences in society and culture mean that one size will never fit all countries, experts concluded that the best results could be achieved if compliance with patient safety regulations was linked to doctors´ pay and/or professional accreditation.

-- *By Sasha Henriques, IAEA Division of Public Information*