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and the Way Forward**

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OCCUPATIONAL RADIATION PROTECTION CHALLENGES IN THE RADIOLOGICAL HEALTH SERVICES OF THE CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES

Over the years, an increasing use of complex medical applications utilizing ionizing radiation has been observed in many countries, including the Caribbean, leading to an increase in the number of occupationally exposed workers. Many countries in the Caribbean face challenges with regards to their ability to introduce and establish effective radiation protection programs in medicine which poses several risks to the protection of exposed workers (Adhikari et al, 2021). In 2019, a survey was conducted by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) to gather information on the current status of the regulatory infrastructure for radiation safety in the Caribbean. The results from the survey demonstrated that many Caribbean countries do not have national legislation on radiation safety implemented. In addition to the lack of or outdated regulatory infrastructure in radiation protection, Caribbean countries also lack a structure for radiation safety for medical applications and a system for education and training in radiation protection. As a result, there is a great shortage of experts in radiation protection with required knowledge, skills and competences. The observed shortage leads to poor implementation of radiation safety practices and thus may pose danger to the safety of patients, workers and the environment against harmful effects of ionizing radiation. In 2021, PAHO started with a program to aid Caribbean countries in the establishment of a radiation protection program for medical applications. A questionnaire was developed to assess the current status of radiation safety for medical applications in a subset of medical clinics in seven Caribbean countries. Based on the results, a gap-analysis was created and a customized radiation protection manual was developed tailored to the applications in the medical sector. After successfully drafting the radiation protection manual, participating countries will be guided by PAHO to implement safety standards, establish a basic system for education and training in radiation protection and ultimately improve safety culture among exposed workers. In this contribution we will review challenges and report on the outcomes of this project in the establishment of an institutional program for radiation safety in Caribbean countries with no national infrastructure for radiation safety.

Adhikari, K.P., Boersma H.F., Coates R., Coulor W., Gallego E., Omrane L. Ben, Suarez R.C. and Tsegmed U. 2021. Radiation protection infrastructure—challenges in developing countries. J Radiol Prot. 41, S171-S180.

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