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Editorial

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X-Rayed to death! Safeguarding your family's health against a major cause of cancer and heart disease

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Editorial

Practitioners of complementary and alternative medicine can play an important role in preventing the incidence of cancer and heart disease simply by raising awareness about the dangers of ionizing radiation from diagnostic imaging tests.

Most people will not develop cancer and ischemia if they are only exposed to those common health risk factors which everyone already knows about. Their greatest risk comes when they are also exposed to ionizing radiation, the essential co-factor in the creation of over half of all cancers and 60% of ischemic heart disease.

Ionizing radiation occurs when energy is transmitted in the form of waves or particles small and energetic enough to enter into the human genome encoded within the DNA of human cells, which itself is very tiny - only about one millionth of an inch wide!

While working on the Manhattan Project in the 1940's, Dr. John Gofman, M.D. , Ph.D. (Physics), developed the process for creating Uranium-235 and plutonium in amounts large enough to make atomic weapons. After the war he became a cardiologist and discovered cholesterol and the role it plays in cardio-vascular disease. For this research he was awarded the Stouffer Prize as one of the top cardiologists of the 20th century. It was Dr. Gofman's well documented hypothesis that damage to the genome by ionizing radiation from medical diagnostic imaging is the major mechanism by which cancer and heart disease develop. If ionizing radiation bombards the DNA of a cell and destroys its apoptosis gene, the on/off switch of a cell's reproductive system which tells the cell when to die, the cell may simply go on and on reproducing, consuming more and more nutrients from its surrounding tissue.

At first the damage will not be noticeable, a single mutant cell being so tiny. However, if the other health risk co-factors are at play within a person, compromising the immune system, the cancerous growth may gallop along unchecked. After a month there may be a thousand such cells, after a year millions, and after twenty to thirty years billions upon billions, enough so that there is a noticeable cancerous tumor.

Radiation also causes ischemic heart disease by creating little tumors within the cells lining the circulatory system. Cholesterol plaques adhere to these tumors and can eventually plug up the arteries, causing heart failure.Fortunately, ionizing radiation is easy to avoid. Some still lingers as a byproduct of nuclear weapons testing, when the military forces of the world dropped 58,000 tons of it on our planet in the form of nuclear fallout. Thank God those days of above ground testing are over.

More ionizing radiation persists in the waste from nuclear power plants. However, unless Homer Simpson is operating your local nuclear power plant, most Americans probably won't be exposed to that much ionizing radiation from nuclear power plants. Enough to kill thousands but not millions.

Unfortunately, most exposure to ionizing radiation now comes from medical diagnostic procedures such as X-rays and CT scans. This tragic fact is so well and widely documented as to be beyond reasonable dispute. Each CT scan delivers as much ionizing radiation as about 60 chest X-Rays, and the use of CT scanning has exploded since 1998. That year Medicare was billed $1 billion for CT scans; by 2008 that figure had soared to $100 billion!

Skeptics as to the dangers of ionizing radiation from medical diagnostic imaging should be asked to answer this question: If there is no risk, why was the Mammogram Quality Standards Act (mqsa)of 1993 (sponsored by Senator Barbara Mikulski and Congresswoman Pat Schroeder) passed into law?

The truth is that these two courageous legislators became aware that from 1975 until 1993 the average dose of radiation from each mammogram was 10 Rads. Two hundred and fifty (250) Rads of exposure in a lifetime is understood to be enough surely to cause cancer, a fact well known by those in the U.S. Navy's nuclear submarine fleet. Even worse, the dose from one mammography doctor's office to another varied wildly, sometimes by as much as 1000%. Equipment wasn't being calibrated. Doses weren't being moderated. However, by 1995, in response to the MQSA, all mammogram equipment was being calibrated annually and doses of radiation emitted were down to an average of 0.163 Rads! Now mammograms are by far the safest form of medical imaging in which ionizing radiation is emitted. As for all other forms of X-Rays and CT scans - well, it's the Wild West, virtually unregulated with gamma ray bullets flying willy nilly.

Overexposure to ionizing radiation from medical imaging is almost never talked about yet is so easy to avoid - often simply by asking the right questions and making the right choices when you go to your doctor's office. Here they are:

1. When was the X-Ray or CT scan equipment last calibrated?

2. How much radiation is being emitted per exam?

3. Are sensitive areas such as the thyroid and breasts being shielded adequately during the exam?

4. What are the health risks from the amounts of ionizing radiation being emitted by this exam?

Dr. Joel Gray, M.D., head of radiology at the Mayo Clinic, said that if these questions are not answered, you should forego the exam.

By the way, the answers to Question 4 can be found in the Sierra Club book **X-Rays: Health Effects of Common Exams** by John W. Gofman, M.D., Ph.D. and Egan O'Connor.

But don't expect doctors to help you avoid this hazard, because most do not understand it themselves. Over 50,000 Americans die every year from diseases caused by overexposure to diagnostic radiation - some because they have received to many exams over the course of their lifetime, many because the equipment used on them has not been properly calibrated. This medical holocaust has been going on full tilt since the end of World War 2, and with increased use of CT scans it has gotten much more deadly in the past ten years.

Our overexposure to medical radiation represents medical malpractice of such epidemic proportions that only the most courageous and honest doctors have even dared to talk about it.

Medical schools do not educate their students about his problem. Medical associations do not address it in their continuing education courses. The Boards of Medical Examiners in all 50 U.S. states have not passed adequate measures to guard against it, and other governmental regulatory agencies which could deal with this issue - such as the FDA - have only just begun to respond, and then with measures which are clearly insufficient, except when it comes to the regulation of mammograms, which are now actually quite safe.

Ironically, many doctors do use ionizing radiation in diagnostic imaging quite safely without significantly increasing health risks for their patients. Moreover, such diagnostic methods can be critical in saving life. These doctors - such as Joel Gray, M.D. at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota - have already put in place proper protocols to protect their patients against excessive exposure to medical radiation, and they still get all the diagnostic information essential to the health of their patients.

Are your doctors among the enlightened few who protect their patients from overexposure to X-Ray radiation?

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