Standing Up for Radiation Safety
IMAGE WISELY™ COALITION ESCALATES EFFORTS TO INCREASE RADIATION PROTECTION FOR ADULTS.
By Matthew Robb

While the benefits of radiologic exams usually far outweigh the side effects, practitioners still need to be informed about using proper radiation dose. In response to this need, the ACR/RSNA Joint Task Force on Adult Radiation Protection will launch Image Wisely™, a high-visibility campaign that seeks to deepen the understanding of radiation protection for adults. The campaign, which is targeted to radiologists, referring practitioners, medical physicists, and radiologic technologists, debuted at the RSNA Annual Meeting on Nov. 28–Dec. 3, 2010.

Image Wisely’s educational component is sweeping in scope, but even more noteworthy is the campaign’s call to action. “Radiation awareness has increased exponentially in the last few years, but now, Image Wisely is asking stakeholders to actually commit by pledging their support and utilizing the radiation-safety resources available on its new website,” says James A. Brink, M.D., FACR, chair of diagnostic radiology at Yale University School of Medicine. Brink co-chairs the Image Wisely Joint Task Force with E. Stephen Amis Jr., M.D., FACR, chair of radiology at Albert Einstein College of Medicine.

Image Wisely is a collaborative effort of the ACR, RSNA, the American Association of Physicists in Medicine, and the American Society of Radiologic Technologists (ASRT). The campaign follows on the success of Image Gently™, which began in 2007 and has focused on safe imaging for pediatric patients.

“The Image Wisely [campaign] seeks to raise awareness of opportunities to eliminate unnecessary imaging examinations and to lower radiation in necessary imaging examinations …”
— James A. Brink, M.D., FACR

“The Image Wisely™ campaign will focus on CT but will broaden to include nuclear medicine procedures, fluoroscopy, and radiography,” says medical physicist William R. Hendee, Ph.D., FACR, distinguished professor of radiology at the Medical College of Wisconsin. Through education and networking, the joint task force anticipates that the campaign will significantly expand among affiliated health-care organizations, educational institutions, government agencies, and vendors.

Delivering Patient Care
Numerous electronic and print resources will be available to imagers, including a new, state-of-the-art website linked to www.RadiologyInfo.org for patient information. The site, co-sponsored by the ACR and the RSNA, will give patients and the general public an interactive guide outlining the benefits of medical imaging and the risks of exposure to ionizing radiation. Additionally, the Image Wisely website will provide links to participating vendors’ microsites that outline dose-reduction techniques for specific equipment.

When combined, these user-friendly tools will foster greater insight among imaging professionals, patients, and the public at large. This information will also reinforce the reality that radiation dose in adult imaging requires further study.

As part of the call to action, the campaign encourages both individual and collective stakeholders to show their involvement in the movement by electronically signing formal online pledge cards “that demonstrate their commitment to the campaign’s overarching principles,” says Amis. He also encourages facilities to enroll in the ACR’s accreditation programs and participate in a national or local dose index registry. Brink adds that the College has “a vigorous radiation-protection process as part of its CT accreditation program” and says ACR’s Appropriateness Criteria® enhance the quality of care by providing evidence-based guidelines so that referring practitioners and other professionals can make appropriate imaging decisions. (Read more on this topic in “From All Angles” on page 17.)

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The Image Wisely campaign reminds all practitioners and patients that the radiation received from medical imaging scans could, over time, have adverse effects. However, the campaign will also convey the message that these advanced technologies also save lives, reduce the need for surgery, and decrease patients’ recovery time. “CT, nuclear medicine procedures, angiography, and interventional imaging methods give us powerful tools but do deliver fairly high doses of radiation,” says Hendee. “As medical physicists, we need to ensure that the protocols we use are optimized according to the ALARA concept without compromising quality.”

Greg Morrison, RT(R), CNMT, CAE, chief operating officer for the ASRT, sees the nation’s 300,000 registered technologists as central figures in the effort to increase awareness about reducing dose. “As the final imaging professional who can make a difference before exposure, it is the technologist’s responsibility to take an active role and ensure that dose is reduced through every means possible,” he says.

Editor’s Note: This article is being published in the member news magazines of the Image Wisely™ charter member organizations.