

WORLD PATIENT SAFETY DAY MESSAGE: PROTECT VULNERABLE PATIENTS

Patients for Safer Nuclear Medicine urges Nuclear Regulatory Commission action on misadministration of radiopharmaceuticals during nuclear medicine scans

WASHINGTON DC - The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared Saturday, Sept. 17 to be World Patient Safety Day, and the [Patients for Safer Nuclear Medicine](#) demands protection for all patients, including vulnerable patients like children, who undergo radiopharmaceutical procedures in the US.

Coalition member Simon Davies, Executive Director of Teen Cancer America notes that the WHO recently expressed concern about the issue of ethics and medical radiological imaging, stating [in an April 2022 document](#) that ‘unlike most of medicine, its patient safety practices draw on the system of radiation protection, as opposed to that provided by medical ethics.’

“On this World Patient Safety Day, every stakeholder – from patients and families to caregivers and policy leaders – is urged to elevate patient safety as a global health priority,” Davies says. “We agree and believe that nuclear medicine procedures should be at the top of the list. Thankfully, the WHO recognizes that policies around radiological imaging need to be reformed.”

Since its inception, Patients for Safer Nuclear Medicine - a coalition of 29 national and regional patient advocacy groups - has focused on one issue: urging the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission to revise an incorrect 42-year-old policy regarding the misadministration of radiopharmaceutical material, called extravasation.

An extravasation occurs when nuclear medicine used in patient scans is inadvertently injected into a patient’s tissue instead of completely in their vein. A large extravasation can not only injure the patient – sometimes manifesting months or even years after the fact – but also compromise images, potentially resulting in a misdiagnosis that contributes to a sub-optimal course of treatment.

Because the NRC was incorrectly told that extravasations cannot be prevented in 1980, at this time, no one is required to be alerted when an extravasation occurs – including the patient, the patient’s doctor, and the NRC, which is charged with overseeing the safety of nuclear medicine procedures in the US. It is estimated that a patient is harmed by a large extravasation approximately once every minute on average.

“It is not an exaggeration to say that for many patients, the use of nuclear medicine in diagnosis and treatment is a life-or-death issue, which is why the NRC’s failure to recognize the significance of large extravasation is so troubling,” Davies notes. “Furthermore, the idea that such information should be kept from the patient and their physician is infuriating and unacceptable.”

Patients for Safer Nuclear Medicine has taken numerous actions, including the creation of an [informational website](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#) feeds, hosting webinars, and leading a petition drive urging the NRC to revise its policy and require reporting of extravasations that meet the same criteria that is required to report all other medical events.

“Nuclear medicine plays a crucial role in the lives of countless patients who have seen their lives extended thanks to the safe and effective use of radiopharmaceuticals,” Davies notes. “Yet with all that good news, we cannot ignore the fact that large extravasations can irradiate patients, including children, with doses that will lead to adverse reactions. This happens far more often than it should, even though it is virtually preventable.

“Our goal closely aligns with World Patient Safety Day,” Davies adds. “Patients have the right to know whether a radiopharmaceutical has been improperly administered during a nuclear medicine procedure. As the agency in charge of protecting patients when nuclear isotopes are in use, the NRC must act now to protect patients from a potentially harmful medical error.”

About Patients for Safer Nuclear Medicine

Patients for Safer Nuclear Medicine is a coalition of patient advocacy organizations dedicated to ensuring the safety of nuclear medicine scans. These scans are conducted every day to diagnose and treat millions of people with cancer, as well as people with heart disease and brain disorders. The coalition is asking the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) – which oversees nuclear medicine safety – to close a 42-year-old loophole that prevents the reporting of large extravasations, which occur when a radioactive drug is accidentally injected into healthy arm tissue instead of a vein prior to a nuclear scan. For more information, visit www.safernuclearmedicine.org.