

MRI safety news concerns

The Health Protection Agency (HPA), via its independent Advisory Group on Non-ionising Radiation (AGNIR), has published a report on static magnetic fields. See the link below for details.

http://www.hpa.org.uk/webw/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb_C/1211184025666?p=1199451989432.

The HPA issued a press release to accompany the publication.

http://www.hpa.org.uk/webw/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb_C/1211354081861?p=1204186170287 on 22nd May 2008.

Both the BBC [<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/7412563.stm>] and the Telegraph newspaper [<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/2004444/MRI-scanners-to-be-examined-for-cancer-link.html>] published articles based around the HPA press release.

The AGNIR publication was generally welcomed and considered to be a useful addition to the MR safety literature. The report concludes in general terms that there is no evidence for any harmful effects arising from the strong magnetic fields associated with the clinical use of MRI scanners. However, several members of Institute and MR experts from the UK immediately raised concerns that both the press release and the media articles were very misleading and potentially damaging to both professionals and patients involved in MRI. The HPA press release appears to give an impression that harmful effects have been identified and there is a need to search for the occurrence of these effects amongst MR workers. Following the publication of the Telegraph article, some people have become worried about risks associated with MR scanners and their current working practices. We were concerned that these unfounded claims may adversely affect MR clinical services and hence patient care.

The following letter was sent to the Editor of the Telegraph on Wednesday 28 May 2008 on behalf of the Institute:

Dear Sir

*In your report, **MRI scanners to be examined for cancer link** (22nd May), we are worried that confusion has been created by the Health Protection Agency's press release accompanying the recent publication by the Advisory Group on Non-Ionising Radiation (AGNIR). It is misleading to assume that proposed research into the health effects of MRI scanners is based on known health risks. The publication actually concludes that there is no evidence of harmful effects. The plan to carry out studies amongst workers, so that detailed data can be collected, is good practice and is not being done because any evidence exists to point to any detrimental health effects. MRI is a very powerful diagnostic tool. It would be regrettable if unfounded concerns generated amongst health care staff and patients undermined clinical services and ultimately patient care.*

Yours

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Chairman of the MR Committee and MR Safety Working Party of The British Institute of Radiology*