

Manual on radiation protection in hospitals and general practice

Volume 2
Unsealed Sources

D. FROST & H. JAMMET



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WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION GENEVA

MANUAL ON RADIATION PROTECTION IN HOSPITALS AND GENERAL PRACTICE

Volume 2 Unsealed Sources

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CONTENTS

Preface	9
Introduction	11
1. CHARACTERISTICS OF UNSEALED SOURCES	13
2. RADIATION HAZARDS OF UNSEALED SOURCES	15
External radiation hazard	15
Internal radiation hazard	15
Contamination risks	18
3. DIAGNOSTIC APPLICATIONS OF RADIONUCLIDES	19
Functional studies	19
Scintillation imaging	21
4. THERAPEUTIC APPLICATIONS OF RADIONUCLIDES	23
Methods of therapeutic application	23
Choice of radioactive preparations	24
Preparation and administration	24
Evaluation of absorbed dose	25
Isolation of patients	25
5. ORGANIZATION AND STAFFING	26
Education of personnel	27
Arrangements for procurement and delivery of radionuclides	27
6. PLANNING OF FACILITIES	29
Preferred location and arrangement of laboratories and clinics	29
Constructional considerations	30
7. GENERAL LAYOUT OF A DEPARTMENT FOR THE USE OF UNSEALED SOURCES	32
Laboratories and premises not frequented by patients	32
Premises and rooms frequented by patients	35
Offices	43
Storage of waste	43
8. EXAMPLES OF DEPARTMENTS FOR DIAGNOSIS AND THERAPY WITH UNSEALED SOURCES	45
Small department	45
Medium-sized nuclear medicine department	47
Large department	47
9. SAFE HANDLING OF UNSEALED SOURCES PRIOR TO ADMINISTRATION	51
Techniques for handling sources	53

Separation of activities and concentration of solutions	54
Receptacles for radioactive liquids	55
Use of small disposable items of equipment	55
Design of working surfaces	56
Protective clothing	56
Movable shielding	57
On-the-spot sterilization before administration	57
Radioactive gases	58
10. EQUIPMENT FOR SAFE HANDLING OF RADIOACTIVE MATERIALS	59
Storage equipment	59
Equipment for transportation	60
Safe handling equipment	61
Equipment for preparation and calibration of delivered radio-pharmaceuticals	61
Equipment for administration and measurement of low activities	62
Equipment for administration and measurement of high activities	65
11. WASTE TREATMENT AND DISPOSAL	67
Type and source of waste	68
Treatment of liquid wastes	68
Treatment of solid wastes	69
Storage of wastes prior to disposal	69
Wastes from radiochemical laboratories	70
12. MONITORING	71
Monitoring of protective clothing and bedding	71
Working surfaces	72
Air monitors	73
Personnel monitoring for external radiation	73
Monitoring for internal contamination	75
Ward monitor	76
13. SPECIAL PROBLEMS RELATING TO TRITIUM AND CARBON-14	77
14. DECONTAMINATION	79
Personnel	79
Clothing and bedding	80
Equipment and apparatus	81
Working surfaces and rooms	82
15. PROTECTION OF PATIENTS	83
Diagnostic applications	83
Therapeutic applications	85
New therapeutic or diagnostic applications	86

16. HANDLING OF CADAVERS WITH INCORPORATED RADIONUCLIDES . . .	87
Storage	87
Preparation for burial or cremation without autopsy	88
Embalming	89
Autopsy	89
17. PROTECTION OF PERSONNEL AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC . . .	90
Protection against external radiation from patients	90
Protection against contamination risks from patients	91
Routine medical supervision of radiation workers	91
Special recommendations	92
Protection of members of the public	92
18. MEASURES FOR DEALING WITH ACCIDENTS	94
First aid	94
Equipment needed to deal with accidents	95
Organization and planning	96
Action to be taken in the event of a fire	96
ANNEX 1. Characteristics of some commonly used radionuclides . .	98
ANNEX 2. Typical activities administered for diagnostic purposes in Swedish hospitals	102
ANNEX 3. Integrated dose received by patients in diagnostic examina- tions using radionuclides	104
ANNEX 4. Radionuclides used in scintigraphy and resulting radiation doses.	107
ANNEX 5. Calculated exposure rates from point sources at various distances	108
INDEX	109

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INDEX	109

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Preface

Much technical material has been published at the national and international levels on radiation protection in the nuclear power industry, nuclear research, and conventional industries. On the other hand, the subject of radiation protection in hospitals and general practice, where a large proportion of public and occupational radiation exposure occurs, has not yet received much attention in the international literature.

The International Labour Organisation, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the World Health Organization all have a long-standing interest in these problems from various points of view. They therefore decided to collaborate in the preparation of a Manual on Radiation Protection in Hospitals and General Practice in several volumes, with each agency taking special responsibility for the volumes that concern it most. However, to simplify distribution and to make it easier for readers to purchase the various volumes, the entire work is being published by WHO.

The manual as a whole deals with the radiation protection of patients, occupationally exposed persons, and the public and is written for the reader having a basic general knowledge of radiation and biology. It is hoped that it will be found helpful not only to those who are directly engaged in radiation protection in hospitals and general practice but also to national authorities, hospital administrators, supervisors, hospital workers, teachers in training centres, and all those who have some responsibility in the subject.

The present volume, the second in the series, reviews the radiation protection requirements in hospitals using unsealed radioactive sources and discusses the problems associated with the administration, handling, and transportation of these sources. The authors also describe the design, construction, and management of nuclear medicine departments and give guidance on methods of reducing the exposure of the patient, the attendant personnel, and the general public to a level consistent with sound medical practice, without impeding the acquisition of necessary medical information.

The preparation of the volume was undertaken by Dr D. Frost and Dr H. Jammet. The final text was completed by Dr H. T. Daw (IAEA) in cooperation with Dr W. Seelentag and Dr B. Waldeskog (WHO).

The draft was reviewed by the experts listed on page 8, some of whom are the authors of other volumes in the series. The observations received were taken into account in the preparation of the final text, and the contributions are gratefully acknowledged.

Introduction

The application of radionuclides in medicine is becoming more and more widespread. They are used both as tracers for diagnosis (particularly gamma emitters) and as therapeutic agents (particularly beta emitters).

The distribution of radionuclides in the body is governed by their physicochemical and pharmacokinetic properties. Various physiological systems may be involved in the process. The pharmacokinetic properties are utilized in diagnosis to study a particular physiological function or to carry out morphological examinations. They are utilized in therapy to obtain selective concentrations in particular organs or tissues.

Almost all physiological systems are involved in such investigations.

(1) The circulation of the blood is nearly always involved and is sometimes itself the object of study (as in cardiography); at other times it may constitute the main element of a study (as in placentography).

(2) The respiratory system may be the object of an examination, or it may serve to distribute a tracer in the lungs for morphological examination.

(3) The blood clearance system is very widely employed, as in the clearance of rose bengal by liver cells, sodium iodohippurate by the kidneys, defective red cells by the spleen, colloidal gold particles by the reticulo-endothelial system in the liver, spleen, lymphatic system, and skeleton, and macro-aggregate of albumin by the lungs.

(4) The excretory functions are frequently utilized, particularly those of the liver and kidney.

The use of the pharmacokinetic properties of a radionuclide or labelled molecule constitutes the most significant aspect of the application of radioactive materials. Examples of pharmacokinetic behaviour that may be exploited are: the role of iodine in the production of thyroxine, the preferential concentration of strontium and fluorine in the skeleton, the preferential concentration of sulfur in cartilaginous tissue, and the preferential concentration of phosphorus and iron in blood-forming tissues.

Because of the diversity of physiological systems, the distribution of radioactive sources in the body is both complex and unstable. Hence, a knowledge of this distribution frequently requires multiple measurements, in time and in space. The measurements are carried out either on the patient himself or on biological specimens.

In the former case the topographical distribution is measured externally in different ways, notably by localized measurements, whole-body counting with the aid of a gamma spectrometer (the profile method), or the scanning