

Symposium on Medical Irradiation Held in Tokyo

On November 17, a symposium on the subject of medical irradiation was held in Tokyo, with workshops led by experts from the National Institute of Radiological Sciences (NIRS) and other related persons. Also, there was a chance for people in the medical field to exchange opinions with government officials concerning the subject.

Although the dosage levels used in medical irradiation are not particularly limited or restricted, some people have called for the necessity such levels on account of technological considerations, as well as to optimize diagnosis frequency, etc. Therefore, the aim of the recent symposium was to get a clearer grasp of the current status of irradiation as used in diagnosis and treatment, with consideration also paid to such matters as the proper way to present explanations to patients.

Regarding medical irradiation, Dr. Kanae Nishizawa of NIRS demonstrated how the radiation dosage incurred in examinations using computer tomography (CT) exceeded that using plain roentgenography by several decimal places. She went on to explain how Japan already boasted more than 10,000 CT devices, far higher than any other advanced country, making the per-capita dosage also extremely high. Given that situation, she cited four criteria for judging the propriety of medical irradiation – (1) the necessity of X-ray diagnosis, (2) the information that can be gleaned from such examinations, (3) its effect on treatment and prognosis, and (4) the existence of alternative examinations – and pointed out that the net benefits of such treatment ought to be optimized after balancing its necessity against the risks incurred.

Meanwhile, other experts at the symposium talked about how difficult it was to get ordinary people to understand medical irradiation. Dr. Jiro Okumura, chief of operations at the National Center for Child Medical Health and Development (NCCHD) in Tokyo, stated that there was still insufficient data to make explanations to patients, while consumer-lifestyle adviser Yuki Aomi said it was hard to distinguish between the Sievert (Sv) unit as used in public-relation pamphlets and the Gray (Gy) unit often used by radiologists during irradiation treatment.

In addition, Dr. Kumiko Karasawa, assistant professor at the Juntendo University Medical School, talked about recent trends in cancer treatments using irradiation, saying that technological advances have contributed to the improvement of dosage concentration, correspondingly increasing the effectiveness of treatment. At the same time, though, she expressed concerns about the deleterious effects that the uneven distribution of equipment and the shortage of technicians were having on medical services.

Speaking from the perspective of the government, Kazuo Todani, section chief of accounting at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) talked about efforts being made to secure budgetary funding in the upcoming fiscal year (beginning on April 1, 2007) for the new plan to train cancer professionals. The plan, which aims to reinforce personnel education, was newly instituted following the passage of the Basic Law for Cancer Countermeasures in the summer of this year.

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