

PRESS RELEASE

HERCA launches a European inspection campaign to assess patient radiation protection in diagnostic radiology

Starting on the International Day of Radiology on 8 November 2016, a number of national radiation protection authorities from 18 European countries will conduct a special series of inspections in radiology departments and practices. The aim of these inspections is to assess the application of the justification principle. By monitoring existing practices, the European authorities hope to identify routes for further improvement in patient radiation protection.

As part of an initiative launched by HERCA*, a number of radiology departments and practices across Europe will be receiving a special round of inspections from their national radiation protection competent authorities during November 2016. The focus of these inspections will be on compliance with the justification principle, which requires that each medical imaging procedure should contribute sufficiently to patient care to outweigh the possible detriment caused by radiation exposure.

The national radiation protection authorities will conduct the inspections in accordance with their own rules and routines, while using the same HERCA inspection template. The template follows the logic of the normal justification process and verifies to what extent the referrers, the radiological practitioners and other staff adhere to the corresponding procedures: does the referral provide sufficient information for the radiological practitioner to assess the imaging request? Are the practitioners' assistants sufficiently aware of what is expected of them? Are others working under their responsibility sufficiently qualified for their tasks? Does anyone check if the requested procedure fits the purpose best and if it complies with national and international guidelines? Do they verify if any similar medical imaging procedures have been conducted recently? Etc.

The goal of this HERCA initiative is to monitor to what extent the justification principle is put into practice in diagnostic radiology across Europe and to identify potential routes for improvement. The findings will be presented in a report that will be published on the HERCA website.

It is HERCA's hope that any improvement of the justification process in diagnostic radiology will not only lead to improved radiation protection, but will also contribute to an overall improvement of health care in its member states.

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* HERCA is a voluntary association in which the Heads of European Radiation protection Competent Authorities work together in order to identify common issues and propose practical solutions for these issues. Its current fields of activity include, amongst others, medical and veterinary applications of ionizing radiation, radiological emergency preparedness and response, radon and naturally occurring radioactive materials. The program of work of HERCA is based on common interest in significant regulatory issues.

HERCA brings together 56 radiation protection authorities from 32 European countries. These authorities develop national legal frameworks for the safe use of ionizing radiation and conduct inspections to ensure compliance with all legal and regulatory requirements.