

**The Health Effects of High Radiation Doses**

A report\* reviewing the effects of high doses of radiation on human health has been published by an independent expert Advisory Group to the Health Protection Agency. At the request of the Department of Health, the report also addresses specific issues concerning the medical management of radiation accidents and incidents. The report highlights the need to maintain sufficient clinical expertise in the UK to deal with any events involving high radiation doses.

The study, by the Advisory Group on Ionising Radiation, contains an extensive review of the science and concludes that research into the diagnosis and treatment of patients suffering from high dose radiation exposure requires increased funding. The number of radiation biologists and clinicians working in these fields has reduced and the Advisory Group recommends that action should be taken to increase numbers.

The report also states that further work is needed for the UK to have adequate facilities to cope with a large, high dose radiation incident. Resources are required to ensure there are appropriate central or local organisation structures to deal with incidents – whether accidental or deliberate – where large numbers of people could suffer significant radiation exposure.

Professor Bryn Bridges, OBE, chairman of AGIR, said: “This report provides a valuable compilation of the requirements for the effective medical management of a major high dose radiation incident. Our study has identified a worrying reduction in relevant UK clinician and researcher expertise. The recommendations were tailored to direct resources appropriately to ensure UK capacity to handle an incident does not fall below a critical level.”

Following the detailed review of the science, the report makes several recommendations on how the UK could improve the diagnosis of radiation damaged patients, the treatment of patients suffering the physical and psychological effects of a radiation incident, as well as the future training needs of clinicians.

The Agency’s Chief Executive, Justin McCracken, said: “The Advisory Group’s report is a valuable contribution to the science of high radiation doses. The observations made about the level of expertise in the UK have been considered by the Agency and raised with the Department of Health. It is important to maintain an appropriate level of medical expertise in the country”.

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\* High Dose Radiation Effects and Tissue Injury. Report of the independent Advisory Group on Ionising Radiation. Documents of the Health Protection Agency. RCE-10. March 2009. ISBN: 978-0-85951-637-2. Available by download from the HPA website:

[http://www.hpa.org.uk/webw/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb\\_C/1237362785060?p=1199451989432](http://www.hpa.org.uk/webw/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb_C/1237362785060?p=1199451989432)

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