Certifiably Competent

CT scan failures point up need for RT certification, safeguards, experts say

By Michael Gibbons

Investigations continue into why 206 CT scan patients at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles received—according to government officials—eight times the normal dose of radiation during brain scans in 2008.

In another ongoing case, a radiologist formerly at Mad River Community Hospital in Arcata, Calif., stands accused of subjecting a 23-month-old boy to 151 CT scans in a 68-minute period, causing substantial chromosomal damage, according to a lawsuit filed by the boy's parents.

Over-radiation cases like these cry out for mandatory certification of radiologic technologists, says Myke Kudlas, MEd, RT(R)(QM), of the American Society for Radiologic Technologists. "I am not sure if the technologists involved in the Cedars-Sinai incident were certified," Kudlas says. "Currently only Colorado, Oregon and Wisconsin require certification requirements for CT operators."

But failures also happen at the institutional level, Anand Lalaji, MD, a radiologist in New York City, points out. "I know certain institutions have a regularly scheduled medical physicist come in and ensure that equipment is performing optimally, but I don't think it's done consistently across the board," he says.

Once protocols are set, no one should be allowed to change them without the approval of the lead radiologist and administrators, Lalaji adds. "Right now, a technologist can go in and change the radiation dose," he says. "For the most part, that's fine. But what if they don't change it back when going to simpler scans? Who should have access to change these protocols at the institutional level?"

Michael Gibbons is an editor at ADVANCE. He can be reached at mgibbons@advanceweb.com.