



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20555

December 23, 1992

Mr. Brent W. Larkin
Director of the Editorial Page
The Plain Dealer
1801 Superior Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44114

Dear Mr. Larkin:

We at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission have followed with great interest The Plain Dealer's series of articles on radiation treatments.

Your series focused on a number of serious medical incidents that have occurred over a period of many years. This reporting, some other recent incidents, and the Commission's prior concerns, have all prompted us to reexamine our medical licensing and enforcement program. This reexamination is underway.

Radiation therapy, involving very large doses of radiation, is an important medical tool for treatment of seriously ill cancer patients. The NRC does not itself regulate what dosage the patient is to receive. This is a decision of the physician within the practice of medicine. What the NRC does regulate is the proper delivery of the radiation therapy to the patient.

Radiation therapy treatments exceed several hundred thousand per year. Published NRC data indicate that the annual rate of these therapeutic incidents is about .03 percent. Nevertheless, the NRC is quite concerned about these incidents. When they occur, the NRC's practice is to learn as much as possible from the incident and to follow up with corrective regulatory actions with the objective of preventing recurrence. We also recognize an obligation in these cases to assure that patients and their physicians have access to radiation information. Your articles have indicated room for improvement in the way that we do both jobs.

There is also a very substantial annual volume of diagnostic treatments per year. Diagnostics involve small doses of radiation and run into the millions of procedures annually. The medical and scientific community regard the risks from these procedures to be very small.

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PDR COMMS NRCC
CORRESPONDENCE PDR

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I would urge that if radiation therapy patients have questions on the treatments which they have received or about to undergo, they consult their physicians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Ivan Selin', written in a cursive style.

Ivan Selin