COMMISSION NOTICES
POLICY STATEMENTS

MEDICAL USES

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Regulation of the Medical Uses of Radioisotopes; Statement of General Policy

AGENCY: Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

ACTION: Final Policy Statement.

SUMMARY: The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) has the following policy statement regarding NRC's future role in regulating the medical uses of radioisotopes. This NRC policy statement is intended to inform NRC licensees, other Federal and State agencies and the public of the Commission's general intention regarding the regulation of the medical uses of radioisotopes. It is expected that future NRC activities in the medical area, such as promulgation of new regulations and development of cooperative relationships with other Federal agencies, will follow this statement of NRC policy.

EFFECTIVE DATE: February 9, 1979.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION: The NRC has developed the following three part policy statement regarding NRC's future role in regulating the medical uses of radioisotopes. On March 17, 1978, the three part policy statement was published in the FEDERAL REGISTER (43 FR 11308) for public comment. Copies of the policy statement were sent to all NRC medical licensees, the States and 25 professional societies, Federal agencies, and individuals. The comment period expired May 16, 1978. Twenty-two comments were received. Nine commenters favored all three parts of the policy statement, four commenters opposed one part of the policy statement and nine commenters addressed specific issues discussed in the March 17, 1978 FEDERAL REGISTER notice. The comments are discussed in Section II. Copies of the comments may be examined in the NRC Public Document Room at 1717 H Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

I. STATEMENT OF GENERAL POLICY

This NRC policy statement is intended to inform NRC licensees, other Federal and State agencies and the public of the Commission's general intention regarding the regulation of the medical uses of radioisotopes.

It is expected that future NRC activities in the medical area, such as promulgation of new regulations and development of cooperative relationships with other Federal agencies, will follow this statement of NRC policy.

Based on past experience and the comments and advice of the public, other Federal agencies, the States, and NRC's Advisory Committee on the Medical Uses of Isotopes, the Commission has developed the following statement of general policy to guide its regulation of the medical uses of radioisotopes:[1]

1. The NRC will continue to regulate the medical uses of radioisotopes as necessary to provide for the radiation safety of workers and the general public.

2. The NRC will regulate the radiation safety of patients where justified by the risk to patients and where voluntary standards or compliance with these standards are inadequate.

3. The NRC will minimize intrusion into medical judgments affecting patients and into other areas traditionally considered to be a part of the practice of medicine.

[1] NRC licenses radioisotopes in three categories byproduct, source and special nuclear material. The NRC does not regulate naturally occurring or accelerator produced radioisotopes. The term *byproduct material* means any radioactive material (except special nuclear material) yielded in or made radioactive by exposure to the radiation incident to the process of producing or utilizing special nuclear material. The term *source material* means (1) uranium, thorium or any combination thereof, in any physical or chemical form or (2) ores which contain by weight one-twentieth of one percent (0.05%) or more of (i) uranium, (ii) thorium or (iii) any combination thereof. Source material does not include special nuclear material. *Special nuclear material* means (1) plutonium, uranium 233, uranium enriched in the isotope 233 or in the isotope 235 or (2) any material artificially enriched by any of the foregoing, but does not include source material.

II. RATIONALE

The NRC and its predecessor the Atomic Energy Commission have regulated the medical uses of radioisotopes since 1946. AEC recognized that physicians have the primary responsibility for the protection of their patients and designed its regulations accordingly. The physicians were required to be licensed by the State, and their applicable training and experience were evaluated in consultation with the Advisory Committee on the Medical Uses of Isotopes. This regulation has been generally oriented toward assisting qualified physicians in discharging their responsibilities to patients. However, regulation by AEC/NRC has at one time or another encompassed nearly every aspect of the delivery of radioisotope medical services to patients. The broadest regulation occurred between 1962 and 1975, when the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) exempted from its requirements for new drugs all radiopharmaceuticals regulated by AEC. During this period AEC regulated the radiation safety of workers and the general public and the safety and efficacy of radioactive drugs and devices with respect to patients. AEC regulation included production of the radioisotope, manufacture of the final radioactive drug product or device, distribution, use and disposal of the products. In 1975, the FDA terminated the exemption for radiopharmaceuticals, stating that it would now regulate the safety and efficacy of radioactive drugs with respect to patients. (As noted later in this statement, FDA does not regulate the physician's routine use of radiopharmaceuticals.) At the same time, NRC withdrew from regulating radioactive drug safety and efficacy, stating that it would regulate the radiation safety of the workers and the public. The 1976 Medical Device Amendments to the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act extended FDA's authority over medical devices (including devices containing radioactive materials) in a way similar to its authority over drugs.

NRC's authority to regulate domestically the medical uses of byproduct material is found in the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, as amended. For example, section 81 of that Act authorizes NRC "to issue general or specific licenses to applicants seeking to use byproduct material for * * * medical therapy * * *." Section 81 directs NRC

vices as may be necessary to provide reasonable assurance of their safety and effectiveness. FDA has not yet had sufficient time to implement its full authority to regulate medical devices containing byproduct, source or special nuclear material. Therefore, NRC will continue to restrict physician's uses of these medical devices, both for diagnosis and therapy, to those procedures that NRC has determined (in consultation with its Advisory Committee on the Medical Uses of Isotopes) to be safe and effective.

The Commission does not consider equipment calibration, qualifications of paramedical personnel or reporting to NRC misadministrations of radioactive material to be exclusively the practice of medicine or a part of physician-patient relationships. The Commission intends to regulate these areas of patient radiation safety where justified by the risk to patients and where voluntary standards, or compliance with these standards, are inadequate.

III. Discussion of Public Comments

A. Comments on the Policy Statement

One commenter opposed the use of the general term "radioisotopes" in the first part of the policy statement. This commenter was concerned that, if taken out of the context of the footnote, it could be interpreted to include naturally occurring and accelerator produced radioisotopes.

The Commission believes that the general term "radioisotopes" is plain English and easily recognized by the public. It was properly footnoted in the policy statement to include the more cumbersome but specific terms: byproduct, source and special nuclear material and to exclude naturally occurring and accelerator produced radioactive material.

One commenter, in opposition to NRC's regulation of patient radiation safety, suggested that NRC limit its role to the radiation safety of the hospital staff and the general patient population. He believes that patient dosimetry is a responsibility of the individual institution and not NRC. This commenter feels that NRC should first require adequate staffing, including a board certified physician or radiopharmacist and a radiation safety officer, and then essentially leave the institution alone regarding dosimetry, instrumentation, calibration, drug procurement or any other function considered to be the practice of medicine.

NRC does require the licensee to staff its operation with a radiation safety officer and a physician (not necessarily board certified) trained to administer radioactive material or radiation to patients. However, the Commission cannot limit its regulatory role to protecting the hospital staff and the general patient population and at the same time fulfill its congressional mandate to protect the health and safety of the public as regards source, byproduct and special nuclear material. The patient being treated or diagnosed with radioactive material, as well as the general public who may be exposed to radiation as a result of that treatment, are all members of the public to be protected by NRC.

Two commenters objected to NRC's regulation of patient radiation safety because they believe that NRC does not have the authority to regulate patient safety. They note that NRC's enabling legislation does not specifically mention the radiation safety of patients. They believe that patient safety is the responsibility of the physician, a responsibility that cannot be shared. They believe that the Commission is in error to equate patients with the public and to consider patients as users rather than recipients of radioactive material.

As noted in the analysis of the similar comment above, the NRC's overriding congressional mandate is to "protect the health and safety of the public. The patient is a member of the public, notwithstanding the Commission's recognition of physicians' primary responsibility for protection of their patients. The policy statement and, indeed, all of the Commission's actions in regulating the medical uses of radioisotopes, acknowledge the secondary but necessary role of NRC in regulating the radiation safety of patients. The Commission also considers patients to be both users and recipients of radioactive material. However, the distinction between receipt and use of radioactive materials is not meaningful in this case because NRC regulates, among other things, receipt, possession, use and transfer of byproduct, source and special nuclear material in protecting the health and safety of the public.

B. Comments on Specific Issues

There were six comments on the question of reporting misadministrations of radioactive material. Three commenters opposed any misadministration reporting and three commenters offered suggestions on how they should be reported. All of the comments will be considered in dealing with NRC's newly proposed misadministration reporting requirement that was published in the Federal Register for public comment on July 7, 1978 (43 FR 29297).

There were six comments on the specific issue of paramedical training. Three commenters believe that it is unnecessary for NRC to become involved in paramedical training because several organizations are already providing or developing minimum standards, guidelines or certification. One commenter believed that NRC should be involved in this area because the technologist, not the physician, does most of the work with radioisotopes. Two commenters believe that radiological physicists should be separated out from other paramedical personnel and one of these commenters offered a definition of radiological physicist.

As noted in the proposed policy statement, NRC is studying the various allied health certification programs currently in effect or being drafted by other Federal, State and professional groups. If the coverage provided by these programs is not adequate to protect the patient from unnecessary radiation exposure, NRC will work with these groups to develop a new NRC proposed rule for the training of allied health personnel.

There were five comments on the specific subject of nuclear pharmacies (radiopharmacies).

One commenter urged NRC to distinguish between radiopharmacists working in a hospital setting and those working in a retail environment (commercial nuclear pharmacy). This commenter also noted the complexity of the problem of definition when the hospital based radiopharmacy provides radiopharmaceuticals to other hospitals and practitioners in its area.

As noted in the proposed policy statement, the NRC will defer to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regarding a determination of those activities of nuclear pharmacies that will be considered manufacture and those activities that will be considered the ordinary practice of pharmacy (compounding and dispensing).

Four commenters objected to NRC's licensing nuclear pharmacies to distribute only those products that they have prepared from FDA-approved radiopharmaceuticals or reagent kits. One commenter cited the practice of nuclear pharmacies supplying radiochemicals to researchers who use them on humans under their own FDA "Notice of Claimed Investigational Exemption for a New Drug" (IND). One commenter noted that FDA permits nuclear pharmacies to operate in the absence of a final determination of their status, providing they meet all State and local pharmaceutical regulations. The two other commenters characterized the NRC's restrictions on the distribution of radiopharmaceuticals by nuclear pharmacies as an unwarranted intrusion into the practice of pharmacy which is regulated by the States.

NRC licenses nuclear pharmacies to distribute radioactive drugs that have been approved by FDA. This includes radioactive drugs subject to an FDA-approved "New Drug Application" (NDA), or "Notice of Claimed Investigational Exemption for a New Drug" (IND). NRC relies on FDA approval of radioactive drugs because NRC has not regulated the safety and effectiveness of radioactive drugs since 1975. Also, there are not many States that are equipped to regulate radioactive drug safety and effectiveness.

Dated at Washington, D.C. this 1st day of February 1979.