

## MORALITY IN MEDICAL RADIOGRAPHY

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The question of morality in medical radiography, has been an important one and will continue to be in the future. The idea of morality appears in every sphere of human endeavour, in his efforts to better his lots. There is the question of morality in the activities of a government which the government should always have in view in its decisions. (Consider Jimmy Carter's campaigns about morality in international relations). Professionals need to consider, constantly, the question morals — particularly, professionals that come in contact with human beings as they practice their profession. Even in private life, many individuals act under the guidance of moral considerations in their daily activities.

In his article — Morality Defined National Development. Dr Chuba Okadigbo of Department of Philosophy U.N.Nsukka, defined morality as a study in behavioural thoughts, as recommended by reason". He states that moral philosophy seeks a goal, and that is to attempt to get beyond feelings and common-place convention and to formulate rational principles. In its own definition, the concise Oxford Dictionary states that "morality is moral principles" and it says that moral is "concerned with character or disposition or with the distinctions mainly right and wrong.

Medical Radiography involves the use of radiations, mainly ionising radiations in the production of images of structures or organs in the body. The body does not realise it when these radiations start passing through it and it is a well known fact that when abused, these radiations are capable of harmful effects on the body. It is for this very fact that morality in medical radiography is of very high significance. The use of these radiations must be very discriminatory and at the same time achieve, by the safest possible technique, the purpose for which they are applied. The achievement of this goal can only result from the observation of certain moral principles by all concerned in the use of these radiations in medicine, VIZ:— the government, the doctors and the medical radiographers. Departure from these principles can only be said to be immoral.

### GOVERNMENT ROLE

It is one of the principles of any government to see to it that its citizens are healthy and safely enjoy any amenities available to them. This is part of its responsibility in protecting its citizens. The Federal Government's efforts can be seen geared towards this direction. One hears of efforts of the government to increase the number of medical doctors and other professionals allied to medicine,

in its attempt to improve health services in the country.

Medical radiography is a profession allied to medicine. Its services are obviously desired, hence, the effort by the government to increase workers in this field. We also know that the use of radiation can be abused, thereby making the use of the amenity offered by the radiographic services unsafe, in the hands of the immoral or the incompetent.

This being the case, it surely will be wise for the government, — if it has not done so, to set up a body, that will control and set standards of protection to be observed by people using radiation in medicine on one hand and by people training radiation workers on the other hand. This is important in view of the projected plan to train en-mass hospital workers. X-ray workers, as things appear, being in the plan. The Federal Government is bound under moral considerations, to do so. Quality and not quantity, is a very important consideration in radiation medical practice, in the light of radiation safety of the populace.

At this juncture, perhaps, it will be good to suggest that the government allows missions that are capable, to open institutions that can train professionals in the fields where morality is an important question to consider in their practice.

I make this suggestion because, it is a well known fact that religion is a very important factor, if not the most powerful factor in the induction of good morals into human beings.

When this is done, then standards as to the quality desired of their products could be set, and constant supervision undertaken for approvals or disqualifications, by the government.

### X-RAY REQUESTS BY DOCTORS

In the case of medical doctors, one of course does not need to emphasize the fact that as they seek to make use of the services offered by diagnostic and therapeutic medical radiography, that morality demands that they really weigh the advantages and the disadvantages to their patients and other people around of such line of action.

### THE RADIOGRAPHERS' ROLE

Of all the people connected in the use of ionising radiation, the medical-radiographer — perhaps, need most to consider the question of morality in his use of these radiations, and in his behaviour while performing his duty. This is because, the radiographer deals directly with

human beings, and in the final analysis, the application of radiation in medical field is mostly done by him. The efficiency and safety with which this is done to achieve the desired purpose is solely his responsibility and depends on his behavioural and technical skills and knowledge.

Chesney and Chesney, in their book "Care of the patient in diagnostic Radiography state as follows:—" A smile from the radiographer can go a very long way towards establishing an easy relationship and removing tension in the patient. Oddly enough it also reduces tension in the radiographer **EVEN WHEN AN EFFORT HAS HAD TO BE MADE TO START THE SMILE**" In other words, they urge radiographers, to attempt to get beyond feelings and formulate principles in their behaviour towards patients, hence, the recommendation to make an effort, even when not in mood to smile at their patients.

They went on to observe that "Many radiographers do not smile at their patients enough, and they fail to realise, as they give instructions to them and bid them come hither and thither that a manner that is meant to seem efficient too often seems forbidding". Perhaps, this is a true statement.

The strong relationship between the attitude of a radiographer and his efficiency at work brings in the question of morality in the non-technical aspect of his work. If as a result of say, his lack of smiles while at work, he creates an impression of sternness, and thus induces an unco-operating attitude in the patient, if as a result of this he keeps producing poor radiographs, which in turn necessitates repeated irradiation of one part of the patient with its consequent over dosing of that part with radiation, then such a radiographer has not considered the question of morality in his work. Morality demands that radiation should not be used indiscriminately. Anything therefore, which will cause the use of radiation unwisely should be avoided. The same consideration applies in the handling of patients during positioning of the patient for X-ray examinations. Morality in medical radiography demands that patients

be handled decently - particularly, patients of opposite sex.

The last two sentences bring in the question of morality in the individual aspect of medical radiography. Apart from decent handling of a patient during positioning for radiographic examination such actions as (1) the use of gonadal protectors or shields, (2) the use of lead aprons where applicable or necessary, (3) the presence of mind during the choice of exposure factors, (4) the use of collimators and (5) the use of lead screens in the wards during radiography should always be carefully considered. Morality demands it. Morality also demands that Radiographic departmental heads and hospital administrators or in fact any person or persons on whom the responsibility falls, should always give the provision of the above, constant priority in their radiographic services.

Finally, I think that the promulgation of a decree, about the control of the use of ionising radiation in medical and dental practices is overdue. So also I believe, do many people who are concerned about the protection of the populace against the abuse of radiation in this country.

In the above article, I have tried to discuss briefly, morality in the practice of medical Radiography in this country, in relation to the roles played by certain groups of people who are directly or indirectly connected in the practice.

#### REFERENCE

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2. D. N. Chesney and M. O. Chesney Care of the patients in *Diagnostic Radiography 4th edition (p.3).*
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