WHO message on the International Day of Medical Physics

The World Health Organization (WHO) wishes to congratulate all medical physicists on their international day. The International Organization for Medical Physics (IOMP) organizes annually the International Day of Medical Physics (IDMP) to raise awareness about the role of medical physicists to improve safety and quality of health care for the benefit of patients.

The IOMP selected November 7 to celebrate the IDMP as this represents an important date in the history of medical physics. Maria Sklodowska-Curie, a co-winner of the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1903 together with her husband Pierre Curie and Henri Becquerel, was born in Poland on 7th November 1867. This same date also represents a milestone in Marie Curie’s life, as well as in the history of radioactivity: the 7th November 1911, she was awarded the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in recognition of her contribution to the development of chemistry by the discovery of the chemical elements radium and polonium.

The first IDMP was successfully celebrated worldwide on 7th November 2013. This year the IDMP 2014 is focused on medical imaging, under the theme “Looking into the Body: Advancement in Imaging through Medical Physics” (http://www.iomp.org/idmp/).

The use of radiation in medical imaging has significantly increased in the last decade and advanced health technology makes new applications safer, granted inappropriate use can lead to unnecessary or unintended radiation exposures and associated health risks for patients and staff.

Medical physicists' skills in managing safety and quality in the use of radiological medical equipment render them key players in promoting and implementing radiation safety culture in health care to protect patients, health workers and members of the public. They also play a key role in radiation protection education & training of health professionals.

There still exist huge disparities in access to diagnostic imaging technologies between and even within countries worldwide. Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is a priority goal for the WHO. UHC equates to all people having access to health services without suffering financial hardship. While population coverage, service coverage and cost coverage constitute the three primary dimensions of UHC, it also encompasses safety, quality and effectiveness in health care.

The IDMP 2014 provides an opportunity to advocate for scaling-up the role of medical physicists as health professionals engaged in the promotion and implementation of radiation safety and quality in health care, thus contributing to health systems' strengthening and UHC.

On behalf of the WHO we are pleased to congratulate our IOMP colleagues on this International Day of Medical Physics. The WHO and IOMP currently hold a Memorandum of Understanding, and the WHO anticipates designating IOMP "an NGO in official relations with the WHO" to further join efforts to support radiation safety culture in Member States. WHO welcomes the IDMP initiative and encourages the MP professionals to continually improve radiation safety and quality, to foster excellence in health care services.