

The Role of the Medical Physicist in Preparing for Radiation Disasters

Since 9/11, hospitals have seen the need to examine their emergency management plans to ensure that radiation disasters are adequately addressed. Hospitals need to be ready to deal with radiation casualties in addition to the possibility of many self-presenters who want to know whether they are contaminated. Hospitals need to be prepared to handle this situation in the first day or two after a disaster until state and federal agencies can mobilize. Medical physicists will play a vital role as responders and sources of accurate information for hospital staff, patients and the public.

Medical physicists will be asked to assist in the decision-making process if an event does occur. This course provides information on the handling of patients who are injured and may be irradiated and/or contaminated with radioactive material. The Center for Disease Control website has guidance on ways to handle self-presenters who may exceed the number of radiation casualties. The psychosocial considerations after a disaster will be discussed and its effects on staff, patients and the public. The course will also address issues to be anticipated for facility recovery after a disaster.

Educational Objectives:

1. To provide resources that are available for developing emergency plans that address radiation disasters and their unique policy considerations.
2. To show how to utilize radiation protection procedures and practices and know how to prepare the facility for radiological emergency medical response.
3. To provide a framework for handling self-presenters who will seek help from their local hospital to determine whether they are contaminated.
4. To understand the psychosocial considerations in responding to a radiological emergency.
5. To know what activities can occur during facility's recovery from a radiation disaster.