



Letter to the editor: The Pundit Speaks
By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.
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“CAT Scans: New Dangers”

About 18 months ago, I cautioned you about the dangers of CAT scans and made you aware of the fact that they actually have been shown to cause cancer and that they pack a mega-dose of radiation, which can be as much as a whopping 500 times more than a conventional plain film X-ray. CAT scans or CT scans (computerized tomography) are used to identify everything from cancers to kidney stones and in the USA, there are about 70+ million CAT scans annually.

But, are they truly necessary, especially for radiation sensitive children? CAT scans had been said to be the cause of as many as 1 in 50 future cases of cancer. That is a highly alarming, big red flag, especially since as many as one-third of all CAT scans performed in the USA is considered to be unnecessary. A 2009 article in Archives of Internal Medicine stated, "Radiation from CT scans done in 2007, will cause 29,000 cancers and kill nearly 15,000 Americans." Please re-read that statement!

A third of these cancers will occur in people who were ages 35 to 54, when they got their CT, about two-thirds will occur in women and 15 percent will arise from scans done in children or teens. Americans are being over exposed to radiation, especially from CAT or CT scans. It is sadly ironic that the study that you are being given to protect your health, may be the very thing that kills you. Estimates are that there will be an extra 2,000 excess breast cancers just from CT scans done in 2007.

We must push manufacturers to provide low-dose CT scanners and to standardize procedures to provide the lowest possible radiation dose for routine studies at all US medical facilities.

In the America that I love, we recognize that unnecessary medical studies, including CAT scans, will unabatedly continue until meaningful tort reform is a reality. Unfortunately, national tort reform is highly unlikely in the foreseeable future. So, always question the necessity of CAT scans, ask if it can be replaced with lower risk studies (i.e., an ultrasound or MRI) and ask the x-ray technician to use the lowest effective radiation dose with your scans.

For a reality check, defensive medicine is expensive and can be dangerous. Push the politicians to enact tort reform but, since so many are lawyers, do not expect any significant changes soon. So, always look out for yourself and your loved ones.

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