

The use of evidence

Two matters have recently caught my attention, a commentary on radiographer reporting and the subject of a letter which is published in this edition.

Firstly, the letter¹ from Richard Harbron poses the question; is radiobiology the forgotten science? He raises valid points about a failure to acknowledge the science of radiobiology and as a consequence its evidence base. Could it be however that we are witnessing the consequences of a general dumbing down of science education in general? While we cannot do much about this, the place of science education in radiography has to be paramount. An integrated approach to teaching where sciences are taught together with examination and treatment techniques rather than entities in their own right may be good in principle but does it detract from the importance of science? It's not enough, for example, to say that some students find 'physics 'hard' and it is more meaningful to integrate aspects of teaching if one of the outcomes is a diminished understanding of scientific principles that underpin radiography. It is the students who should be able to integrate the parts to make the whole otherwise we are in danger of promoting training at the expense of education. Without a sound science base we should not be surprised if some are prepared to accept a non-evidential practice base as Harbron points out. The easier path will not be to challenge practices but continue to use the impoverished approach of *'that is the way things have always been done'*; hardly an approach to inspire confidence. While Harbron may be correct in his assumption that radiobiology is the forgotten science the more worrying danger is that some will never have the opportunity to grasp important principles in the first place. If radiobiology is not the most important topic it is certainly not the least important either.

The second matter that caught my eye was a commentary appearing in Aunt Minnie Europe by Dr Peter Rinck who is described as 'Europe's very own maverick radiologist'. The piece entitled *'Rude awakening: Will radiographers eventually take over'?*² highlighted a decision taken by a major Dutch hospital to train radiographers to read images. Rinck seemed displeased that this goes well beyond the red dot system. Well let's applaud the decision of the Dutch hospital authorities for that, there could be little justification for introducing a system past its sell by date. Rather than see image interpretation by radiographers a better approach advocated by Rinck would be to reduce unnecessary examinations. Nothing wrong with that but in itself is demanding of a high workload and is unlikely to compensate for the ever increasing capacity of imaging. He raises legal and ethical aspects and asks who will be responsible for the contents of the reports? Why would it not be the person who wrote the report? Why is there an assumption that radiographers will not be accountable for their actions? They are in all other aspects of life. Rinck's reference to the potential of a substandard service is disingenuous. Those of us in the UK will be familiar with similar groundless comments made by some in the UK in the past. As I have stated in a previous editorial³ it is difficult to understand why radiographers are singled out for such special attention. There does not seem to be the same level of enmity shown to other non-medical reporters. It is intriguing but at a time when global health care costs are rising inexorably there is no need for turf wars. The interests of the patient must be paramount and not those of individuals who support restrictive practices. The way ahead surely has to be health professionals working together ensuring that the skills of each are used to the best effects. In a forum that followed the Aunt Minnie feature, contributors from the UK produce very good counterarguments to Rinck's suppositions. There is a good evidence base to support the role of radiographers in image interpretation. Radiographers are no threat to radiologists

and it could be said that image interpretation has made for closer and better working relationships between a number of disciplines. It is important that it is the evidence that is disseminated and not disingenuous comments and platitudes.

1. Harbron R, Radiobiology-the forgotten science? *Radiography* 2011; **17**: 177

[page numbers to be inserted when known please]

2. Rinck P. Rude awakening: Will radiographers eventually take over?

<http://www.auntminnieeurope.com/index.aspx?sec=nws&sub=rad&pag=dis&ItemID=605025> [accessed 16.5.11]

3. Price RC, The past is a foreign country. *Radiography* 2010; **16**: 169-170

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