

Medical Physics in Algeria

The Algerian Association of Medical Physicists, (AAMP) was founded in 1994 and has over 40 members worldwide. The majority of AAMP members practice in Algeria. As in many developing countries, radiation protection procedures in Algeria are not heavily regulated as in developed countries and radiotherapy and nuclear medicine facilities are less computerized. The major and most serious problem facing the AAMP is the inexistence of a professional status for medical physicists in Algeria.

In a survey made by the European Federation of Organization of Medical Physics (EFOMP) in Europe, Algeria presents the lowest number of physicists per million of the population, while Sweden presents the highest one.

There are 6 Cobalt units, 3 linear accelerators, 8 CT scanners and 7 scintillation cameras in Alergia. Radiology facilities are limited: one MRI scanner serves the entire country. Private facilities are limited and are prohibitively expensive for the average person. Radiation therapy/nuclear medicine is concentrated in Algiers. No radiotherapy or nuclear medicine facilities currently exist in the South.

Approximately 90% of nuclear medicine facilities have no physics support. Although textbooks and journals kindly provided by AAPM through IOMP are available, their use is limited to medical physicists working at the main Radiation Research Center (Centre de Radioprotection et de Surete). Algeria is connected to Internet through the Centre de Recherche sur l'Information Scientifique et Technique (CERIST).

Education and training are important factors for adopting, using, and supporting medical physics activities. The first graduate program in medical physics in Algeria was initiated in 1988. The program comprised general courses in physics and mathematics and more specific courses in medical physics with special emphasis on radiotherapy physics. No courses were given in diagnostic radiology, medical imaging and nuclear medicine. There are some IAEA courses and training programs that are mainly intended for young physicists and researchers. One training program still define medical physics as "radiation protection in hospitals."

Some projects in Algeria are sponsored by the IAEA. Unfortunately, the IAEA policies are such that cooperation is conceived only with governmental organizations in member countries. Therefore most of these projects are managed by unqualified individuals. An example is the project ALG/6/005: "Maintenance and Quality Control of Medical Instruments" is managed by a technician who is not knowledgeable of nuclear medicine instrumentation, while motivated researchers are left uninformed and are often isolated. Therefore many programs have been unsuccessful. The AAMP is willing to play an important role in creating awareness and proper communications with higher authorities if given the opportunities.

Finally, we are planning to organize the first International Conference on Medical Physics, which will be held in Algeria in the period 18-20 February 1998. We are looking for potential sponsors willing to support this activity. You are kindly invited to visit our WWW site and attend this conference.

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the students also have a possibility to hear some themes from medical physics which are involved in subjects of the 4th year of study. At the end of study they get the title "Diplom Engineer in Physics." In post-graduate education study at the same faculty there is a two-year scientific direction named Medical Physics which results in a "master of science" degree (MSc) (after defending the theme).

In practice, many of today's medical physicists reached their "doctor of science" degree (Ph.D.) after they finished their MSc in nuclear physics and dosimetry. The reason is that Medical Physics is a relatively new direction and the main core of the present radiation physicists population has already been working for several years. Unfortunately, we observed significant difficulties in the internal status and recognition of physicists (and clinical engineers too) in the hospital institutions, clinics and institutes. Namely, although our experts may have MSc and Ph.D. scientific levels, can be members of the international associations and are participating in many teams of advanced medical practice enjoying the obligations and activities of the same level of responsibilities as doctors in the medical work, they are treated in today's health regulations law as "non-medical" professions. The reason arises from the non-existence of the form of **organized specialization**, during the study of postgraduate medical physics at FNMS, (which would include on-the-job training, for example in oncology and radiotherapy, radiology or nuclear medicine, as for medical doctors). The final consequence reflects in the inequality in position and (material) status (compared to medical staff).

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