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Medical physics and communication: Cool hand luke?

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While it might seem a medical physicist responds with a great deal of detailed information when someone wants is a single number or a yes or a no, there are reasons why this occurs. First of all, the training backgrounds for physicians and medical physicists are quite different. Medical physicists come from an academic structure and training whose focus is on details and quantitative responses. However, those details are often not memorized but calculated or estimated on the fly as they are needed to respond to questions. This is quite different from the training background which requires detailed memorization of anatomy or syndromes or differentials. This difference in training does not become apparent for Medical Physicists that are solely in scientific teaching environments or in research environments. However, it becomes apparent in clinical environments. In this setting clinicians (both Radiologists and non-Radiologists) often wish for a single concise quick answer to a question that could be very complicated such as the risk of cancer for a CT exam. Within the Medical Physics community it became quite apparent to examiners at the ABR oral boards that this communication challenge was very often due to the lack of clinical experience. Interestingly, this led to the creation of medical physics residency programs. With residencies becoming a necessity to become board certified in Medical Physics there is hope that the future will not have as many failures to communicate as in the past.

Biography

Richard L Morin is a Brooks-Hollem Professor at Mayo Medical School. He completed his PhD in Medical Physics at University of Oklahoma. He is the Director of Physics in Radiology at Mayo Clinic, Florida. He is a former President, Chairman of the Board of the AAPM and member of ACR Board of Chancellors, ABR & ABII Trustee. He has received the Coolidge Gold Medal Award from American Association of Physicists in Medicine (AAPM) and from American Roentgen Ray Society.

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