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An approach for determining if your patient is pregnant: Results from a Delphi Study

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Diagnostic nuclear medicine procedures expose the patient to ionizing radiation. Although the amount of radiation used in these procedures is considered relatively low, in the pregnant patient it has the potential to cause biological effects in the fetus. This is especially important in the early weeks of pregnancy when the fetus is most sensitive to radiation and the woman may be unaware she is pregnant. The use of hybrid imaging techniques, incorporating computed tomography (CT) with nuclear medicine imaging, is increasing and these types of imaging procedures have the potential to dramatically increase the exposure to both the patient and any unknown fetus. All female patients of child bearing age should be questioned prior to any diagnostic imaging procedure that utilizes ionizing radiation to determine if they are pregnant. A survey of current practice in Australia in 2011 revealed a lack of a consistent approach to questioning the patient about their pregnancy status. A Delphi study was conducted in 2014 to provide consensus statements regarding the most appropriate method for questioning female patients and approaches for specific groups of patients deemed challenging such as teenagers. The study also developed a simple flowchart to assist staff when questioning their patients. These statements and the flowchart should, when implemented into clinical practice, maintain a consistent and thorough approach which will subsequently assist in reducing the possibility of inadvertent fetal irradiation.

Biography

Daphne James is a Nuclear Medicine Technologist with over 25 years clinical experience. She has completed her PhD in 2015. She is the Program Director for Medical Radiation Sciences and a Lecturer in Nuclear Medicine at the University of Newcastle, Australia. Her research interests include fetal radiation exposure, occupational radiation exposure and radionuclide breast imaging.

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