

NEW ETHICAL ISSUES IN RADIOLOGICAL PROTECTION FOR RADIOLOGY

J F Malone

Department of Medical Physics and Bioengineering, St James's Hospital and Trinity Health
Sciences Centre, Dublin 8, IRELAND

The ethical basis for many medical practices has been challenged over the last two decades. This is possibly most evident in events leading to controversy, such as those related to the infant organ retention scandals; concerns about the sourcing and use of blood products; self regulation of medical practice in the wake of the Harold Shipman Enquiry in the UK; ethical permissions in medical research projects; problematic clinical trials; and many other happenings. It has become obvious following investigations and/or public enquiries that a gap has opened up between what is acceptable to the public on the one hand, and what appears reasonable to, or is at least accepted by, the professionals involved on the other.

Radiology has seen enormous growth since the 1960's. Many practices and equipment types, now commonplace, did not exist a generation ago. Yet the fundamental ethical basis for these practices has not seen a corresponding level of development. This is possibly an oversight, and may be particularly important given that these innovations have taken place over a period of changing and evolving social attitudes. Areas of concern include, for example, issues around justification; consent/authorisation; inadvertent irradiation of the foetus/embryo during pregnancy; and the place of paternalism/individual autonomy in the structure of practice.

This paper reviews these issues and the conclusions of a workshop held in late 2006 to review them and, if necessary, make recommendations to remedy any deficits identified. It focuses and overviews three areas: (a) Some aspects of current practice within radiology; (b) Concerns related to Ethical Issues from other professions, such as law, social and political sciences, theology and philosophy; (c) Concerns from those involved with the formation and response to public opinion, such as patient groups, politicians, and the media.

E-mail presenting author: jfmalone@haughton-institute.ie, jifmal@gmail.com