

IRPA North American Workshop on the Ethical Dimensions of Radiological Protection

“Radiation protection is not only a matter for science. It is a problem of philosophy, and morality, and the utmost wisdom.” L. S. Taylor, 1956

The International Radiation Protection Association is pleased to announce the first North American Workshop on the ethical dimensions of the radiological protection system. This workshop, sponsored by the Health Physics Society, the Canadian Radiation Protection Association and the Sociedad Mexicana de Seguridad Radiologica will be held in Baltimore, Maryland on July 17-18, 2014, immediately following the 59th Annual Meeting of the Health Physics Society at the Hilton Baltimore hotel, 401 West Pratt Street. The Workshop will begin at 1:00 pm on Thursday, July 17, and conclude at 5:00 pm on Friday, July 18. Registration information is available on the IRPA web page (www.irpa.net).

IRPA has been requested by the ICRP to support the latter's initiative on the philosophy, and in particular the ethics of radiological protection. Consequently IRPA has organized a series of international workshops on the ethical dimensions of radiological protection in order to gather comments, experience, and suggestions from its Associate Societies that will support the development of a guidance document. (This process was successfully used to develop the IRPA Guidance Document on Radiation Protection Culture.) Workshops have already been held in Asia (Daejeon, Korea) in August 2013, and Europe (Milan, Italy) in December 2013. These workshops featured presentations on the subject from various perspectives, followed by breakout sessions to develop suggested positions on the various issues. The ICRP has created Task Group 94 under Committee 4 (Application of the Commission's Recommendations) to develop an ICRP publication on the ethical dimensions of the radiological protection system, and a draft for review is planned to be completed by the end of 2015. The input from IRPA will be an important contribution to this document, representing the views of the global radiation protection profession.

Some issues that have emerged from the first two workshops are that although the ethical foundations of the ICRP principles of Justification, Optimization, and Limitation are consistent with the major Western philosophical traditions including utilitarian ethics (Hume), deontological, or duty ethics (Kant), and virtue ethics (Aristotle), and with the Eastern philosophical traditions of Confucianism, there is no clear and comprehensive description of the ethical basis for the radiation protection system that can be applied globally. An issue that emerged from the Fukushima Dai-Ichi nuclear power plant accident is that in a given situation, especially an emergency, ethical principles can be in conflict. Although the assumption of the linear no-threshold model is based on the virtue of prudence, its application may lead to violations of the principles of respect for personal autonomy and dignity. It may also result in the imposition of a real risk of premature death to avert a potential risk, such as occurred in the evacuation of elderly and ill persons from the fallout zone. This appears to have violated a fundamental principle of medical practice: first, do no harm. On the other hand, if this population were not evacuated, would the rights of caregivers to avoid an involuntary potential risk be violated? Obviously such questions are not easy to answer.

Six hours of continuing education credit (2 per half-day) have been granted by the ABHP for attendance. Breakout sessions are scheduled to focus on the areas of regulations, medical applications, and public communications. However, other topics may be added to or replace these if attendees desire. IRPA Treasurer and HPS Past President Dick Toohey is the coordinator for this workshop, and may be reached by email at either retoohey@comcast.net or treasurer@irpa.net. There is no registration fee.

The program for the North American Workshop is as follows:

Thursday, 17 July:

1:00 Welcome and Introduction	R. Czarwinski, IRPA
1:30 Basic Principles of Biomedical Ethics	C. Kurihawa, NIRS
2:00 Introduction to the Ethical Foundations of the RP System	J. Lochard, ICRP
2:30 The Ethics of RP: Philosophy, Values, and Practical Challenges	R. Toohey, IRPA
3:00 Break	
3:30 Ethics of RP in Medicine	R. Vetter, Mayo Clinic
4:00 Ethics of RP in Public Communications	R. Johnson, RSCI
4:30 Standards of Professional Responsibility for CHPs	E. D. Bailey, AAHP
5:00 Assignments and Goals for Breakout Sessions	R. Toohey, IRPA

Friday, 18 July:

8:30 Continental breakfast	
9:00 Breakout Sessions (Regulatory/Medicine/Public Communications)	Session Leaders
10:30 Break	
10:45 Breakout Sessions	Session Leaders
12:00 Lunch (on your own)	
1:30 Reports of Breakout Sessions	Session Leaders
3:00 Break	
3:30 Development of Conclusions and Recommendations	R. Toohey, IRPA
5:00 Closing of Workshop	R. Toohey, IRPA