The IAEA has begun a major international initiative to train interventional cardiologists in radiation protection. Starting with the first course in May 2004, so far 6 regional and 3 national training courses have been conducted with the participation of over 400 health professionals putting the IAEA in a leading role in this area. Cardiologists are among the most intensive users of fluoroscopy in the medical profession and generally have little or no training in radiation protection. 1., 2.. There is a need to increase awareness about the potential for exposing patients undergoing cardiac catheterization procedures to relatively high levels of radiation to levels much higher than those handled by many radiologists. A patient undergoing percutaneous transluminal coronary angioplasty (PTCA) faces radiation exposure of the order of a thousand or more times that involved in chest radiography. Furthermore, the number of interventional cardiological procedures performed is doubling every 2 to 4 years in some countries.

A programme of two days' training has been developed, covering possible and observed radiation effects among patients and staff, international standards, dose management techniques, examples of good and bad practice and examples indicating prevention of possible injuries as a result of good practice in radiation protection. The training material is freely available on CD and will be placed on the Radiological Protection of Patients website at http://rpop.iaea.org/.

The surveys conducted among participants in these programmes indicated that more than 85% and in some cases 100% of the participants were attending a structured programme on radiation protection for the first time; had not attended any cardiology conference where
there was a lecture on radiation protection; and did not measure radiation doses to patients. More than 50% do not use a badge to monitor their own exposure.

In order to achieve sustainability of radiation protection in Member States, a regional cooperation project in Asia (RCA) has been launched to begin in 2007. It will create a network of trained cardiologists with the capability of continuing on-going activities through professional bodies. It is hoped that this will lead to sustainability in radiation protection activities in cardiology by 2010.

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