

**RADIATION PROTECTION
POLICY AND PROCEDURES
NUMBER : 19**

COMFORTER & CARERS
and Others Exposed Via the Medical Exposure of Another Person

Who are COMFORTER AND CARERS?

"COMFORTERS AND CARERS", under IRR99¹ are defined as "individuals who (other than as part of their profession²) knowingly and willingly incur an exposure to ionising radiation in the support or comfort of another person who is undergoing, or has undergone a medical exposure"

COMFORTER AND CARERS may include members of the public who, for example

- visit patients in hospital after those patients have been administered with radiopharmaceuticals or are undergoing brachytherapy
- offer support for those patients at home who have undergone certain nuclear medicine procedures, or had sealed sources permanently implanted
- (in some cases) offer support to a young child or disabled person while that person is X-rayed

and are likely to receive more than the public dose limit of 1 mSv a year resulting from direct radiation or contamination during the comfort and support they offer.

If they are unlikely to receive more than 1 mSv a year then they need not be classified as COMFORTER AND CARERS under IRR99.

IRR99 also allows a separate dose limit for persons who may be exposed to radiation resulting from the medical exposure of another. This limit is 5 mSv in 5 years. This limit is designed for friends and family, including children, who may not be aware of being exposed, or able to give consent. This provision is aimed mainly at the nuclear medicine patients.

¹ The Ionising Radiations Regulations 1999

² i.e. **not** nurses, radiographer, staff accompanying residents of nursing homes, etc.

Action Required for COMFORTER AND CARERS

There is no dose limit for COMFORTER AND CARERS, but it is appropriate to apply DOSE CONSTRAINTS³.

The general dose constraint will be 5 mSv for COMFORTERS AND CARERS. Procedures should be designed that will keep doses to COMFORTER AND CARERS below this level.

Staff should satisfy themselves that COMFORTER AND CARERS are aware of the risks involved in supporting and comforting a patient and are willing to incur the exposure they will receive. These arrangements may involve effective communications with the patient or directly with the COMFORTER AND CARER. The information needed will depend upon the particular circumstances of the exposure.

As with all persons, doses to COMFORTER AND CARERS must be kept as low as reasonably practicable, and must never exceed the dose constraints defined below. Consider time, distance, and shielding.

Lead-rubber aprons and other shielding should be utilised wherever practical.

Pregnant women should not normally act as COMFORTER AND CARERS, however for circumstances where this is appropriate, a dose constraint of 1 mSv should be applied.

Exceptional Circumstances⁴

In most cases, COMFORTER AND CARERS would normally be expected to keep to the arrangements for keeping their dose as low as is reasonably achievable, and below the dose constraint. However, they may choose to depart from them, for example by spending more time with a seriously ill patient than is recommended, thereby incurring a dose greater than 5 mSv. This is perfectly reasonable provided that they do so willingly and are aware that they may incur a small additional risk from this increased exposure.

³ ACOP 8(3)

⁴ IRR99 Approved Code of Practice and Guidance (2000), para. 131