



Shields Radiation Oncology Center - Mansfield
A SHIELDS' STURDY MORTON PARTNERSHIP
combining strengths to provide better care



Radiation Safety Commentary

On January 24, 2010, the Boston Globe and New York Times featured an article on radiation safety that cited radiation mishaps in New York. While the incidents cited were extremely unfortunate, it should be noted that radiation therapy treats and cures many cancers safely and effectively, providing hope to millions of patients world wide.

Upon learning of a cancer diagnosis, many patients are often overwhelmed, lacking in medical knowledge, strength and energy. We hope to provide information that will make radiation therapy and safety easier to understand and navigate.

An important quality indicator is accreditation by the American College of Radiology (ACR), a process that involves intense scrutiny of policies and procedures and on-site inspection of the cancer center to ensure the highest levels of practice standards. There are only a handful of accredited sites in Massachusetts. All Shields radiation oncology sites are ACR accredited. To learn more go to www.acr.org.

To ensure the highest levels of safety, we take several in-depth measures to confirm the specified amount of radiation is being safely administered. Our radiation oncology centers undergo an annual, independent audit conducted by the Radiological Physics Center to make certain that our radiation output complies with national safety standards. Output testing is also repeated monthly in accordance with national standards. We also conduct daily testing that is in full compliance with recommendations from the American Association of Physicists in Medicine.

We place great emphasis on our treatment planning system. We complete the nationally recommended quality assurance tests and upgrade the system as necessary to assure it meets national standards. Accuracy and consistency is verified through audit procedures and processes.

For patients receiving Intensity Modulated Radiation Therapy (IMRT) we have mechanisms in place to prevent error. While regulations state that safety checks *should* take place prior to the third treatment **we insist** on checkpoints prior to patient treatment to assure accuracy. Although many centers do not insist upon a practice run, we feel this is essential. We conduct a cross check of all calculations and computer validity before a patient receives his or her first IMRT treatment. We believe double checking the treatment plan and parameters before a patient starts his or her treatment is critical to patient safety and treatment precision.



Shields Radiation Oncology Center - Mansfield
A SHIELDS' STURDY MORTON PARTNERSHIP
combining strengths to provide better care



As stated earlier, accreditation of the radiation oncology therapy center is an important quality indicator and you should feel empowered to ask your health care providers about timeframes for treatment plan checks, IMRT testing policy and professional staff certification. This information will give you insight into the center's quality standards and radiation safety procedures. It is also important to assess the culture of the center, including staff experience and dedication to patient care. Commitment to safety involves investing in both equipment and professional education to ensure your oncology team has the knowledge and expertise and the tools to remain at the forefront of advances in cancer treatment. It also involves participating in national protocols and providing additional resources needed to benefit and comfort patients. These are just some of the factors our oncology facilities have adopted and fully implemented to uphold the highest quality standards. Our goal is to support you during your oncology journey and set the benchmark for patient safety.