

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL RADIATION PROTECTION ASSOCIATION (IRPA)

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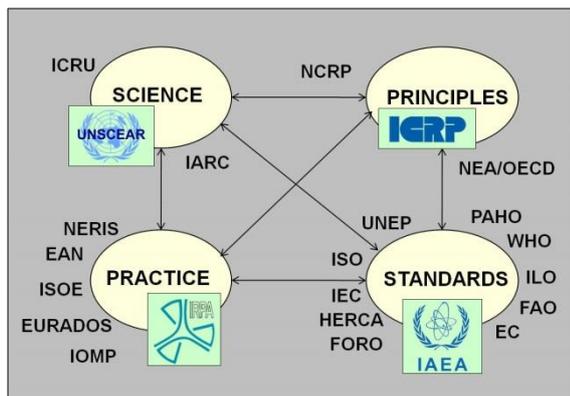
Abstract— This article presents briefly the roles of the International Radiation Protection Association

I. INTRODUCTION TO IRPA

The International Radiation Protection Association (IRPA) is an independent non-profit association of radiation protection professionals joining through national and regional radiation protection societies (the Associate Societies - AS). The defined **Mission Statement** of IRPA is as follows:

IRPA is the international professional association for radiation protection. Through national and regional Associate Societies and radiation protection professionals, IRPA promotes excellence in radiation protection by providing benchmarks of good practice and enhancing professional competence and networking. IRPA encourages the application of the highest standards of professional conduct, skills and knowledge for the benefit of individuals and society.

The figure below shows schematically the relationship of the international organizations and professional bodies in the system of radiation protection. It identifies the primary functions of organizations in the four pillars of science, principles, standards and practice, and underlines the organizations having a leading role and a responsibility in these functions.



The Four pillars of Radiation Protection

It is noted that the diagram is not an exhaustive identification of all the organizations involved in radiation protection worldwide. The diagram also illustrates the evolution of the international organization of radiation protection with the increasing role of professional networks.

IRPA has the pre-eminent role in the generic field of radiation protection ‘practice’. Our strength is the involvement of professionals/practitioners across all fields of radiation protection, covering scientific research, teaching, regulation, medical practice, nuclear and non-nuclear industry, national/international policy and all other fields. Through our 18,000 members in 52 Associate Societies (AS) covering 67 countries, we encompass the full spectrum of national experiences, from large developed countries through to practitioners working in small developing nations.

IRPA has defined the following **Vision statement**:

IRPA is the international voice of the radiation protection profession.

II. IRPA AND IOMP

As is evident from the above introduction, IOMP and IRPA are essentially sister organisations. We are both in effect ‘international federations’ of national/regional societies, representing the views and interests of our respective professions. IRPA’s sole focus is radiation safety, with no interests in wider technological issues or in other technologies. Whilst the majority of our members work outside of the medical sector, healthcare is nonetheless our largest single sector, with around 25% of our members working alongside medical physicists and doctors in the medical environment. Indeed many individuals are members of both our organisations.

III. THE IRPA STRATEGIC PROGRAMME 2016-2020

IRPA is managed in a four year cycle, beginning and ending at successive International Congresses. The current period commenced at the IRPA14 Cape Town International Congress in May 2016 and runs through to the IRPA15 International Congress in May 2020, which will be held in Seoul, South Korea. An Executive Council (EC) is appointed for each term, and the composition of the current EC is given in the Appendix.

Our strategic priorities for 2016-2020 are grouped under four headings, each of which has several specific work programmes:

- To promote our role as the international voice of the RP profession through engagement with other international organisations and professional bodies on the development of the system of protection, giving emphasis to impacts on practical implementation.

Liaison with our partner international organisations: Consultation on the system of protection: Horizon scanning: Enhancing the interface with key international organisations in the medical sector

- To support the needs of the Associate Societies by developing, enhancing and sharing good practice and high standards of professionalism.

Radiation Protection Culture: Ethics in Radiation Protection: Public Understanding: Implementation of the Eye Dose Limit: Security of Radioactive Sources: Young Professionals Network

Sharing Good Practice: Underpinning the future of our profession: Supporting the AS in developing effective national interfaces between the AS and the medical sector: Implementation of systems for the recognition of competence: Supporting the development of AS through the exchange of general good practice and experience.

- To support the education and training of RP professionals

Education & Training practices: IRPA's Regional and International Congresses: Coordination and promotion of AS training activities and associated events: Database of training events: Scientific developments update.

- To enhance IRPA Governance and the interface with the Associate Societies.

Enhanced regional engagement: Interface and Communications with the Associate Societies: The 'View of the Profession': Guidance for the Organisation of IRPA Congresses.

This will form the core of IRPA's activities for the current term up to 2020, and we look forward to cooperation with the Associate Societies, individual members and the international organisations including IOMP in delivering this programme. Full details of this

programme are available through the IRPA website [www.irpa.net].

Selected Highlights from the Programme

We are actively pursuing all of the activities defined in our strategy as outlined above, but it is appropriate to expand on some selected key topics as below.

International Voice of the Profession

IRPA has direct engagement with many international organisations, including ICRP, IAEA, WHO and many others. Our key role is to help ensure that the development of philosophies, systems and standards in radiation protection takes account of the practical experience and needs of the practitioners. Through our congresses and information systems we also provide opportunities for our partner international organisations to keep the practitioner community informed of their activities.

The Future of the Profession

Many radiation protection societies around the world are facing a challenge to ensure that there is a continuing flow of young persons into the profession to meet the needs of the future. In many societies there is a trend of declining membership numbers. IRPA has a strong emphasis on supporting and developing the young scientists and professionals already within our ranks, and we are also looking to share the many good ideas for attracting students and other new recruits into the profession.

Public Understanding of Radiation and Risk

We all have experiences which clearly demonstrate the lack of understanding of radiation and risk amongst many parties within 'the public', and indeed within some professional sectors such as medicine where the level of general knowledge about radiation effects is often very low. This lack of understanding can lead to outcomes which sometimes seem to be based on a fear of radiation which we would consider as irrational, but which nonetheless is the real perception of many.

During the previous IRPA term we established a Public Understanding Task Group to encourage and support the AS in the development of effective means of enhancing public understanding of radiation risk through the sharing of good practice, ideas and resource material. We believe that there is a growing need and interest for the AS to enhance their programmes in this important area. This is a key but challenging activity which needs further support. Our work is therefore continuing, with the objective of broadening from sharing materials to assisting the AS and individual professionals to better understand the challenges of communication, and to be better equipped to meet them. We welcome IOMP's engagement in this programme.

Radiation Protection Culture

In 2014 IRPA published our Guiding Principles for Establishing a Radiation Protection Culture. All AS are encouraged to develop plans and additional material to support local implementation within all our workplaces. It also became apparent that it would be helpful to develop high level guidance specifically for the medical sector. This ongoing joint programme with IOMP and WHO is very active and well supported, and will be the subject of a further paper. We are also considering the development of higher level guidance for other sectors, such as Higher Education, Research and Teaching (HERT).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Many of you will always think of IRPA as the organisation that holds congresses – both international and regional. Such congresses have been a long-standing part of our programme since our inception over 50 years ago. Of course these remain central to our identity, but I hope that the above outline of our activities clearly demonstrates that IRPA has a much wider role in support of the profession.

IRPA is well placed and respected by the wider international organisations to feed back the practical experience of day to day professional RP activities into developing top tier philosophy and standards. We actively promote the sharing of good practice and good ideas around our community of radiation protection societies around the world, leading to greater professionalism in the way we all act. And we support and provide for the training and education of our individual members.

Given the closeness of our work in the healthcare sector, it is imperative that IRPA and IOMP work

together to deliver radiation safety within this sector. By using all our resources and experience for the benefit of the common good we can jointly achieve huge strides in embedding radiation safety in healthcare. We look forward to working with you at this exciting and challenging time for radiation protection.

Appendix: The IRPA Executive Council 2016 – 2020

- President: Roger Coates (UK)
- Vice-President: Eduardo Gallego (Spain)
- Vice President for Congress Affairs:
Jong Kyung Kim (South Korea)
- Executive Officer: Bernard Le Guen (France)
- Treasurer: Richard Toohey (US)
- Publications Director: Christopher Clement (Canada)
- Elected Council Members:
Ana Maria Bomben (Argentina)
Alfred Hefner (Austria)
Sigurður Magnússon (Iceland)
Marie-Claire Cantone (Italy)
Klaus Henrichs (Germany)
Hiroko Yoshida (Japan)

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