



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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No. III-05-011

March 31, 2005

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NRC BEGINS SPECIAL INSPECTION AT SOUTH BEND HOSPITAL

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has begun a special inspection at St. Joseph's Regional Medical Center in South Bend, Ind., to review the circumstances surrounding the radiation treatment of several patients in 2004.

The hospital reported to the NRC earlier this week that the patients had received unintended radiation exposures to their legs during treatment for cervical cancer. The unintended exposures occurred when a small sealed capsule containing a radiation source shifted during treatment, resulting in the radiation dose to the skin of the patient's leg instead of the intended treatment area.

The hospital reported that five patients may have received the unintended skin doses. Three patients experienced skin ulcerations following the treatments, and two did not.

An NRC inspector began an initial review at the hospital on Wednesday, March 30, and two additional inspectors joined the inspection on Thursday. An NRC medical consultant has been retained to evaluate the medical aspects of the unintended radiation exposures.

"This inspection is one of the NRC's regulatory tools to assure that nuclear materials are used safely for patient care," said Geoffrey Grant, NRC Deputy Regional Administrator. "Our inspectors will be carefully reviewing these cases to determine if the agency's safety requirements have been met."

The medical center has notified the patients and their physicians of the treatment problems.

Following the completion of the inspection, the inspectors will present the results of the inspection to hospital management in a meeting open to public observation. The schedule and location of the meeting will be announced later.

The written report of the inspection, when completed, will be available in the NRC's online document collection, known as ADAMS, at: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams.html>. Help in using ADAMS is available by contacting the NRC's Public Document Room at 1-800-397-4209 or 301-415-4737 or by e-mail at PDR@nrc.gov.

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