“Why is it important to ask if pregnancy is a possibility?”

Special precautions are required for some pregnant patients

The risks of harmful effects due to ionising radiation is higher for unborn children, especially during the first months of pregnancy. It is important to ask explicitly, if the patient is, or could be, pregnant. In some cases, it might be advisable to postpone the imaging examination or to consider an alternative examination method in order to protect the fetus.

Except in cases of vital necessity or emergency, CT scans and X-rays of the abdominal/pelvic region should normally be postponed until the end of pregnancy. If this is not possible, and the examination has to be carried out, all necessary precautions should be taken to minimize the dose to the fetus.

Talk to your patients about it!

Avoiding or postponing an imaging examination can be in the patient's interest!

The benefits for the patients

- They avoid unnecessary exposure to ionising radiation leading to a potential risk for the unborn child
- They receive special attention, ensuring the choice of the diagnostic imaging examination that involves the least or no exposure to ionising radiation

What information do the radiologists need?

The confirmation or suspicion of pregnancy must be explicitly stated in the examination referral sent to the radiologist. Referrals requiring high-dose examination of the abdominal/pelvic region (CT scans) are of special concern. In many cases, the radiologist can adjust the examination to limit or avoid exposure to ionising radiation. Prior discussion with the radiologist remains the key for requesting the most appropriate examination.

How to talk about imaging with pregnant patients?

Even if radiation dose is low, exposure of an unborn child to X-ray involves a higher risk than for an adult. The cell damage in the fast-developing tissues of the unborn child can potentially, depending on the dose received and the stage of pregnancy, lead to cancer. In the case of exceptionally high doses (rarely reached in a single examination) growth retardation, malformations and brain damage[1] could occur.

1. Source : United Nation Environment Program «Radiation: Effects and Sources» (2016)

Talk to your patients about it!

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