



Bone scans can support asylum seekers' claims of torture

Political asylum seekers often claim they were tortured in their native country. Because the injuries may have been inflicted months or even years before, it is often impossible to confirm their stories with a medical examination or by a standard radiographic study. In a recent issue of the *Lancet*, however, Dr. Siroos Mirzaei and colleagues in Vienna reported that bone scintigraphy allowed them to establish evidence of torture in people seeking refugee status in Austria. In some cases, the injuries had been inflicted years ago.

With the technique, a radioactive isotope is injected and accumulates in areas where bone remodelling and repair is under way — a process that can continue for years after the initial injury. Radiation from the isotope causes these areas to “light up” when viewed with a gamma camera.

Scintigraphy is usually used to detect subtle bone injuries, such as those caused by cancer and infec-

tions. Mirzaei and his colleagues did a scintigraphic study involving 25 asylum seekers who claimed to have been beaten by security forces in their homelands. The torture allegedly took place 4 months to 5 years before the scintigraphic examination. Twelve of the 25 claimants said they were tortured with blows from hard objects, such as guns and truncheons, and 13 from blows with fists or kicks. For comparison, 25 people with no history of torture were also studied.

Scintigraphy detected injuries in all 12 of the patients who reported beatings with hard objects, whereas standard x-rays detected injuries in only 5 of them. Of the 13 asylum seekers who had reported beatings with fists and kicks, scintigraphy detected injuries in 7; most of these injuries were fairly recent. In this group, no injuries could be seen on x-ray films.

In both groups, the bone damage was consistent with injuries described

by the asylum seekers. In the 25 people without a history of torture, only one — who had a hip disorder — had an abnormal scan. “Bone scintigraphy is a highly sensitive and useful tool to document trauma consistent with allegations of ill-treatment made by an asylum seeker, even 1-2 years after torture,” Mirzaei concluded.

Toronto lawyer Sergio Karas, who represents refugee claimants in Canada, hailed the study. “All we have at the moment to rely on is commonly available medical evidence — medical examinations, x-rays and obvious scars. But often the evidence is inconclusive and can be interpreted either way. If conclusive evidence could be presented to the Immigration and Refugee Board, it would have a two-fold effect. On one hand it would establish that the person was actually tortured, making it easier for the refugee board to resolve a claim, and on the other hand it would assist in screening out bogus claims.” — © *Gil Kezwer*

Alberta radiologists target chiropractors

The Alberta Society of Radiologists says the province's diagnostic radiologists should refuse consultation requests from chiropractors who ask for diagnostic imaging of any type involving children aged 18 years or younger.

In resolutions passed at the society's annual meeting in September, members also said diagnostic radiologists should not provide consultations of any type unless the chiropractor involved follows guidelines established by the Canadian Orthopaedic Society. The society also said no imaging report can be delayed because the film record has

been forwarded to a chiropractor.

Although the resolutions are not binding, society president Dr. Bruce Bristowe said they reflect growing concern over health and safety issues surrounding chiropractic. “The resolutions were simply an expression of the will of members of our society,” he said. “They also recognize a concern for issues pertaining to increasing utilization and appropriateness.” He added that radiologists are also concerned about potential medicolegal problems arising from work with chiropractors.

Orthopaedic, which is defined as the provision of manual therapy “in

a safe, scientific and responsible manner,” developed because of concerns about some chiropractors' practices. The guidelines supported by Alberta's radiologists stress that “orthopaedic practitioners promote the benefits of immunization. The society does not believe that spinal manipulation ‘adjustments’ are necessary as a part of general health care. It is unethical to manipulate a joint that is essentially normal.”

Copies of the orthopaedic guidelines are available from the Alberta Society of Radiologists, 18411 - 121 Ave., Edmonton AB T5V 1R2; 403 447-3375.