



Image of the profession

Röntgen's rays

Wilhelm C. Röntgen's discovery in November 1895 of a new type of ray that made soft tissues transparent and revealed the bones immediately brought excited responses from physicians —*Autopsia in vivo!*— and the public and from a good number of charlatans as well. His original German publications were reprinted in English in *Nature* and *Science* within less than 3 months. Even before that, on Jan. 29, 1896, and only 23 days after the discovery



Dr. M.K. Kassabian and patient, circa 1900. Reprinted with permission from *Radiology* 1945;45:503-21.

had been announced in the daily press, x-rays began to be used in the treatment of breast cancer.¹ Diagnostic and therapeutic apparatuses were identical, and neither had any protective shielding: the naked tube from which the radiation emanated was rigged on a stand in front of or behind the patient. The physician in this photograph from 1900, observing the patient's chest on a fluoroscopic screen, is a Dr. M.K. Kassabian, an American who later died of a carcinoma attributed to the dose of x-rays he had received.²

Warnings of the harmful effect of Röntgen radiation came as early as July 1896 but did not do much to deter enthusiasm about the mysterious rays. Complete tinker kits to produce this penetrating radiation could be bought in the United States by mail order for \$15, delivered.³ It is not known how many people were hurt before the need for protection was recognized but, by 1904, more cautious minds had established norms and guidelines for radiography.

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References

1. Grubbe EH. Results and technique in treating epitheliomas with X-rays. *Radiology* 1933;21:156-68.
2. Pfähler GE. The development of Röntgen therapy during fifty years. *Radiology* 1945;45:503-21.
3. Glasser O. *Dr. W.C. Röntgen*. Springfield, Ill: Charles C. Thomas; 1945.

Tetanus

i brought my work home
with me, you said,
pulling out the band-aid
and the swab
and the needle last

years overdue, you said
i'm good at this,
but don't move, ok,
or it might hurt, and it will
hurt tomorrow anyway,
but don't move

and i realized you had trained
all those years for this:
to torture me with needles
in front of the tv,
to puncture me
during my leisure time

your enthusiasm was hideous
and my brain's heart balked
at this new terror
with the familiar face

i don't want it, i said
maybe some other time —
with witnesses around
and how do i know
it's a tetanus shot anyway?
it could be arsenic
or truth serum or heroin
and frankly
i don't wanna die
or tell the truth
or be your junky love slave

shut up
and take a deep breath

you said

it wouldn't hurt you said so
i heard you say that

it's because i love you

i rubbed my arm
and considered all
the weapons
in love's arsenal

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