



January 25, 2010

Subject: ASTRO's Response to *The New York Times* article, "Radiation Offers New Cures, and Ways to Do Harm"

Dear ASTRO Members:

No medical error is acceptable and the two instances reported are devastating. We regret the suffering the patients and families were forced to endure.

However, the numbers reported are exceptionally misleading. The story cites 621 radiation mistakes. During that time, we estimate half a million New Yorkers received 13.6 million daily radiation therapy treatments, meaning radiation errors occurred only .0046 percent of the time. We believe your readers should see this context.

Even one error is too many and ASTRO continuously works to strengthen the radiation oncology safety culture. We are at the forefront by providing quality assurance tools, hands-on training for sophisticated treatments like IMRT, guidelines on treatment use, new technology assessments and accreditation. ASTRO leads an international coalition improving equipment interconnectivity to prevent errors.

All treatments pose risks and patients should discuss them with their doctors. Radiation therapy is a tool no different than a knife in the hands of a surgeon. It should be used only by those with appropriate training and board certification.

Sincerely,

Tim R. Williams, M.D.
ASTRO Chair