

Doctor's x-ray method may ease colon tests

(AP) — Dr. David J. Vining of Wake Forest University, the principal developer of the new method, calls it "virtual colonoscopy" — a way to combine X-rays and computers to examine the entire colon without actually putting anything into it except air.

The new approach yields a 3-D, from-the-inside view of the colon that doctors can explore by moving around a joy stick while watching the passing bumps and crevices on a computer screen.

Colon cancer is the No. 2 cancer killer of men and women after lung cancer. This year, an estimated 55,300 Americans will die from it.

The mainstay of screening for this disease is a skinny, flexible tube that is inserted through the rectum into the colon. The doctor looks through the tube for growths called polyps that may be cancerous.

The American Cancer Society and other health organizations recommend that people over 50 be checked with sigmoidoscopy, an exam of the lower third of the colon, every three to five years. If this reveals any possible problems, the next step is colonoscopy, which uses a

longer tube to view the entire 4 to 6 feet of the colon.

Vining's idea, which he said was inspired by computer games, involves a relatively new form of X-ray technology called spiral CT. Ordinary CT scanners slowly take cross-sectional images of the body one picture at the time. The new machine spins around the patient and snaps 400 to 500 pictures in half a minute.

Vining uses two commercially available software programs to process the spiral CT data and turn it into a 3-D image.

Vining has tested it on 20 patients who were about to undergo regular colonoscopy. It accurately found the four who turned out to have cancer.

Before undergoing the test, patients must have their bowels flushed out. Then air is pumped into their colons. The exam itself takes just 30 seconds, and no sedation is required.

"Afterward, the patient gets off the table, passes wind and goes home," Vining said.

The new approach should also be cheaper. Vining estimated that an exam will cost \$450 to \$650, compared with \$900 to \$1,800 for colonoscopy.

Chad releases U.N. employee

WASHINGTON (AP) — An American employee of the United Nations, kidnapped in Chad last week, has been released, the State Department said Monday.

Anthony Johnson's health "is reported to be stable," said spokeswoman Christine Shelly.

"He is with the U.S. consul general from our embassy in Lagos, Nigeria, and a Nigerian doctor," Shelly said. "They're making arrangements for onward travel to Lagos, where Mr. Johnson will be able to receive the necessary medical attention."

She did not say what medical attention he needed. She had said earlier that he had diabetes and that his life would be in danger if he were not immediately released.

Johnson, a technical consultant for the U.N.

Development Program, was taken from his home on March 19 in the city of Mao, according to U.N. spokesman Ahmad Fawzi. An official at the U.S. Embassy in Chad said his driver, from Mali, and two Chadian guards had also disappeared.

A group of Chadian rebels, backed by Libya, claimed to have taken Johnson to show that Chad President Idriss Deby could not control security in his country. Deby seized power in November 1990 after leading an invasion from Sudan.

Shelly said Johnson was released late Sunday night in a Nigerian town.

She said the U.S. government appreciated the efforts of the government of Niger, as well as those of Chad and Nigeria, in obtaining his release.

EPA reports decline of toxic pollution

WASHINGTON (AP) — For a third year in row, America's industry reported a decline in releases of toxic pollution into air, water and land, the Environmental Protection Agency said Monday.

Even so, more than 2.8 billion pounds of toxic chemicals, including 180 million pounds of cancer-causing substances, went into the environment in 1993, and industry reported it is generating more toxic wastes annually.

The 1993 releases, the latest for which data has been gathered, reflects a 12.6 percent decline compared with the previous year in toxic emissions into the environment from 20,000 industrial plants and refineries nationwide.

But some of the reductions reflect the fact that more wastes were shipped away from factories for off-site disposal or recycling. Many of these facilities, in turn, are not subject to the annual reporting process, EPA officials said.

The EPA said the industrial companies subject to reporting,

including the chemical, plastic and paper industries, released 1.7 billion pounds of toxic pollutants into the air in 1993, about 60 percent of the total. An additional 271 million pounds went into rivers and lakes, a decline of 2 percent.

The report showed a reduction of 406 million pounds of toxic releases in 1993, down 12.6 percent from 3.2 billion pounds in 1992. Toxic releases declined 6.6 percent in 1992 and 9 percent in 1991.

There is normally a two-year lag between the year in which data is recorded and when it is made public by the EPA.

Meanwhile, industry continues to produce more toxic wastes as part of various production processes, despite efforts at some companies to reverse that trend. Toxic wastes generated at the thousands of facilities subject to the reporting law increased slightly for a second year in a row.

Congress required the toxic release inventory data in 1988.

While the toxic release inventory covers 313 chemicals

released at thousands of factories nationwide, EPA officials acknowledged that it gives only a partial picture of toxic pollution. The agency has proposed nearly doubling the number of chemicals and expanding the types of industries that must participate.

For example, in 1993 more than 4.7 billion pounds of wastes were shipped off site for treatment, disposal, recycling or burning in energy incinerators. Many of those facilities are not covered by the reporting law and, therefore, any releases that might occur as part of the recycling or disposal process are not included in the federal statistics.

Such off-site shipments are increasing annually.

While the amount of toxic releases into the air, water and land declined in 1993, an additional 318 million pounds of wastes were shipped to recycling facilities, an increase of 11 percent. The amount of wastes sent to off-site disposal companies jumped 23 percent to 325 million pounds.

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