

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MEDICAL PHYSICS PROFESSION IN THE CENTRAL AMERICAN REGION

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The development of the Medical Physics profession in the Central American region has been impressive, if we compare to the status existing 20 years ago. In year 1997, a sub-regional IAEA technical cooperation project for Central America and the Caribbean region (Fig.1), coded ARCAL XXX, estimated that the number of physicists working in hospitals were less than 10 in all countries, devoted only to Radiotherapy, and most of them lacked a postgraduate education in the field. At that time, they were only few cobalt machines for teletherapy and low dose brachytherapy sources; none or very basic dosimetry equipment were available and only a 2-D TPS was used in Panama, which later was involved in the accident of overdose.

Currently, according to a recent ALFIM/IOMP survey, there are 91 medical physicists in the region, half of them with a MS level in Medical Physics. Only in Costa Rica there are 2 MS programs in Medical Physics and there is a BS program in Nicaragua. Although there are still many problems related with the recognition of the profession, the lack of locally certified clinical training programs, the weakness or inexistence of national medical physics associations, emigration of professionals due to low salaries, etc., it should be recognized the great effort made by different institutions, entities and individuals, specially the IAEA, PAHO and ICTP, in order to improve quantitatively and qualitatively the Medical Physics profession in the Central American countries.

