Cytogenetic Biodosimetry using the Blood Lymphocytes of Astronauts
K. George,1 J. Rhone,2 L.J. Chappell3 and F. A. Cucinotta4
1Wyle, 1290 Hercules Drive, Houston, TX 77058, kerry.a.george@nasa.gov, 2University of Houston, 4800 Calhoun
Road, Houston, TX 77004, 3USRA, Division of Life Sciences, Houston TX 77058 and 4NASA, Lyndon B. Johnson
Space Center, 2101 NASA Parkway, Houston TX 77058.

ABSTRACT

Cytogenetic analysis of blood lymphocytes remains the most sensitive and reliable method available for in vivo
assessment of the biological effects of exposure to radiation and provides the most informative measurement of
radiation induced health risks. To date chromosome damage has been assessed in lymphocytes from more than 30
astronauts before and after they participated in long-duration space missions of three months or more on board the
International Space Station. For all individuals, the frequency of chromosome damage measured within a month of
return from space was higher than their prefight yield and biodosimetry estimates lie within the range expected from
physical dosimetry. Biodosimetry data provides a direct measurement of space radiation damage, which takes into
account individual radiosensitivity in the presence of confounding factors such as microgravity and other stress
conditions. In contrast to physical measurements, which are external to body and require multiple devices to detect
all radiation types all of which have poor sensitivity to neutrons, biodosimetry is internal and includes the effects of
shielding provided by the body itself plus chromosome damage shows excellent sensitivity to protons, heavy ions,
and neutrons. In addition, chromosome damage is reflective of cancer risk and biodosimetry values can therefore be
used to validate and develop risk assessment models that can be used to characterize excess health risk incurred by
crewmembers. A review of astronaut biodosimetry data will be presented along with recent findings on the
persistence of space radiation induced chromosome damage and the cytogenetic effects of repeat long duration
missions.