

# Evaluating the Effect of Acquisition Parameters on Image Quality in SPECT with LEAP using Quadrant-Bar Phantom at Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital

<sup>1,3</sup>Issahaku Shirazu, <sup>2</sup>John Humphrey Amuasi, <sup>1,2</sup>Mary Boadi, <sup>1,3</sup>Edem Kwabla Sosu, <sup>1,3</sup>Francis Hasford

<sup>1</sup>Medical Radiation Physics Centre, Radiological & Medical Sciences Research Institute  
Ghana Atomic Energy Commission P. O. Box LG 80, Legon – Accra, Ghana.

<sup>2</sup>Graduate school of Nuclear and Allied Sciences, University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana  
P. O. Box LG 80, Legon - Accra, Ghana.

<sup>3</sup>National centre for Radiotherapy and Nuclear Medicine, Department of Nuclear Medicine  
Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital, Accra Ghana.

## ABSTRACT

The study was undertaken to evaluate the effect of acquisition parameters (matrix size, count density and object-collimator distance) on the quality of SPECT images using the Statistical Moment Method. Images were acquired by placing the quadrant-bar phantom on flood field uniformity Phantom filled with 25mCi of 99m-Tc solution. The method involved keeping two of the three acquisition parameter constant while varying the remaining parameters. The experimental results demonstrate that as the matrix size increases from 64x64 to 1024 x 1024 the image quality improved by 28% in image resolution. Also, Image quality is degraded as the distance between the object and the collimator increased. At 00mm object-collimator distance (when in contact) the image quality is improved by 28.57% from the default setting of 40mm. Furthermore, count density has a minimal influence on image quality. Matrix size of 512x512 produce the best image resolution, taken into account the acquisition time and stability factors, hence should be adopted for used and the detector should be as close to the object as possible. However, the count density should be 20 Mcts since the result produced exactly the same image resolution with higher count densities but with shorter acquisition time.

**Keywords:** Statistical moment method, Resolution, Full width at half maximum, image quality, acquisition parameters, and Radiopharmaceutical

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nuclear medicine is a specialty of medicine which utilises radiopharmaceuticals in an unsealed form either for therapy or diagnosis to study a particular physiological function or to carry out morphological examination making use of the pharmacokinetic properties or selective localisation of a radiopharmaceutical in a particular organ or tissue [1].

Thus, Nuclear Medicine can be divided into three main categories: *in vivo*, *in vitro* and Therapy. The main aim of *In vivo* procedures is to accurately measure the distribution of radioactivity within the human body which has specifically localised in an organ of interest and the production of images exhibiting the best diagnostic quality with the least possible patient radiation exposure. The aim of *in vitro* is to study components of an organism that has been isolated from its usual biological context in order to permit a more detailed or more convenient analysis than can be done with whole organisms using radiation while, the main aim for therapy is for treatment with radiation [1].

In Ghana, Nuclear medicine is mainly used for diagnostic purposes using an *in vivo* procedure. This is done with other imaging modalities in the department of radiology in order to completely diagnose the extent of a disease-process in the body, mostly in oncology cases. However, it is also use for thyroid therapy in limited cases.

Single Photon Computed Tomography SPECT is used for patients study at Nuclear Medicine Department, hence the need for the study of its input parameters to assess and compare with international standards.

This study was based on the theory of statistical moment equation which is based on the first and second statistical moment of region of interest as applied to bar phantom images. This leads to the estimate of the modulation transfer function (MTF) and the full width at half maximum (FWHM) of line spread function (LSF). Hence, the relationship between FWHM, bar width, mean and the standard deviation is established after a series of integration.

This method is accepted as the best method for measuring the resolution of SPECT systems. The theory has been

applied successfully by the medical physics unit of the Department of Radiology, University of Texas [2]. It is also accepted by International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and American Association of Physicist in Medicine (AAPM) as the best method for measuring resolution of SPECT systems [3].

$$FWHM = 1.058 \times \text{Bar width} \times \sqrt{\ln\left[\frac{4}{\pi} \left\{ \frac{(\mu_{ROI})}{\sqrt{2(\sigma_{ROI}^2(f_b) - \mu_{ROI}(f_b))}} \right\}\right]} \quad (1)$$

The image quality was assessed using the calculated FWHM values to estimate the resolution. The acquired data were evaluated and interpreted based on the effect of the three acquisition parameters on the FWHM values in relation to the Acquisition time, which is the time require to acquire an image.

## 2. ACQUISITION PARAMETERS

### 2.1 Matrix Size

Matrix size is deals with the division of field of view into square areas (pixel), and expressed mathematically as;

$$\text{matrix size} = \frac{FOV}{PIXEL SIZE} \quad (2)$$

Selection of the matrix size for the projection views forms an important aspect of SPECT imaging. During imaging, the computer divides up the gamma camera field of view (FOV) into square areas (pixels). The total number of pixels for a particular FOV forms the matrix size for that FOV. Essentially, 64x64, 128x128, 256x256, 512x512 and 1024x1024 matrix sizes are available for selection with Siemens SPECT machine at Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital in Accra, from which 256x256 matrix size is the default setting on the computer system.

### 2.2 Count Density and the Count-Rate Performance

Count density is the number of photon received by the detector within a specified volume. The count-rate performance of a scintillation camera describes the non-linearity in the relationship between the count rate and the intensity of incident (received) gamma radiation by detector, and also the spatial displacements in the image that occur as a result of high count rates [4].

Count density or photon density is the number of counted events recorded in scientigraphic per square centimeter or per square inch of imaged area.

### 2.3 Object-Collimator Distance

Object-collimator distance is the distance between the object and the detector surface. The resolution of the

Statistical Moment Equation is used to calculated FWHM values with known values of the bar width of least resolved bars, the mean and the standard deviation of a region of interest. The moment equation is expressed as in equation 1.

gamma camera degrades as the distance between the camera and object being imaged increases [5]. Also, a certain fraction of gamma rays from an object is attenuated (absorbed) when they are emitted in an attenuating medium, such as a patient. This phenomenon varies according to the depth of attenuating medium between the object and the collimator of the gamma camera. In clinical SPECT, opposing projection views will never be the same, hence, 360° of arc is required for accurate reconstruction in most SPECT studies [6]. This allows anterior and posterior view of the imaged organ.

## 3. METHODS

The materials used include; Flood-field uniformity phantom, Quadrant bar phantom, SPECT System, Radioactive source (Tc-99m), Mo/Tc Generator and LEAP Collimators.

The flood field uniformity phantom at Korle-Bu Nuclear Medicine Center is a rectangular perspex container with internal dimensions of 180 mm x 300 mm, the total volume of the empty container is approximately ten liters' and with filled weight of approximately 13.0 kg. This phantom is designed to provide the periodic performance testing for the SPECT systems. It offers a single system for measuring resolution and uniformity.

The container has three removable metal screws which are fixed at the two opposing corners on the top surface of the container and made water tight with rubber rings. This arrangement made it easy to fill in water. During usage the three removable screws are removed and filled slowly with water using syringe and an attached needle. In the case of this study the phantom was filled with 25mCi of Tc-99m water solution. This together with Quadrant bar phantom was combined for imaging.

The quadrant bar phantom consists of four quadrants, A, B, C, D with lead strips of different thicknesses but the same length embedded in Perspex glass. At the Nuclear Medical center of the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital, the Quadrant bar phantom has lead strips of thickness 2.0mm (A), 2.5mm (B), 3.0mm (C) and 3.5mm (D). These represent the distance between two lead strips. It is used for quantitative measurements of resolution.

The combination of the two phantoms allowed photons from the flood-field water to pass through the spacing between the lead strips in the quadrant-bar phantom and detected by the camera. The combined phantom (quadrant bar phantom on flood field uniformity phantom) was positioned on the SPECT gamma camera patient bed, by ensuring that the flat axis of the phantom was positioned parallel to the axis of the gamma camera detector, within the field of view (FOV) of the detector. Before placing the combined phantom on the patient bed quality control (intrinsic) was done after which the LEAP collimator was first mounted and homed to position the camera system ready for imaging. The acquisition protocol on the computer system software was selected and the process of imaging carried out. After the acquisition was done, circular ROIs was drawn on the smallest set of bars that was least resolved and the average counts per pixel ( $\mu_{ROI}$ ) in the ROI for the chosen bar width and variance of the count ( $\sigma_{ROI}^2$ ) in each pixel in each case read from the e-soft display which have been generated by the system. By using the moment equation, the FWHM values were calculated.

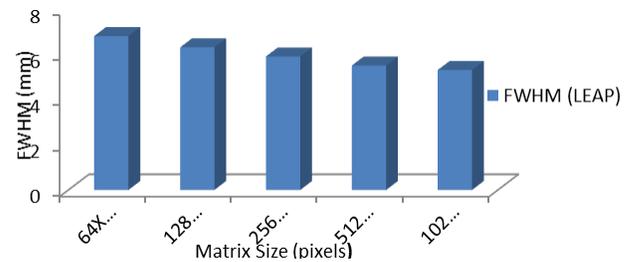
## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1 Matrix Size

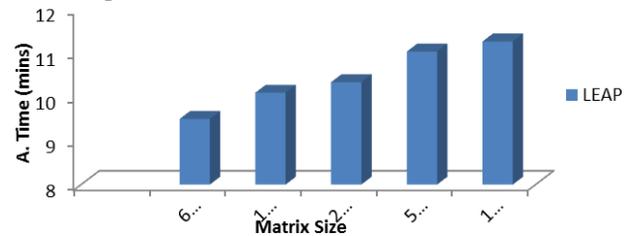
Table 1 shows data collected with constant count density and object-collimator distance at 20 Mcts and 20mm respectively while varying the matrix size from 64x64 to 1024x1024 using Low Energy All Purpose (LEAP) collimator. While Figure 1 and 2 represent variation of matrix size with FWHM and acquisition time respectively.

**Table 1: Matrix size variation with FWHM and Acquisition time for LEAP**

Matrix Size (pixel)	FWHM (mm)	Acquisition Time (mins)
64X64	6.8	10.09
128X128	6.3	10.29
256X256	5.8	10.47
512X512	5.4	11.09
1024X1024	5.3	11.29

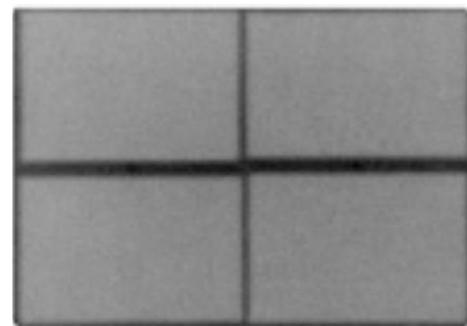


**Figure 1: Variation of Matrix size and FWHM**

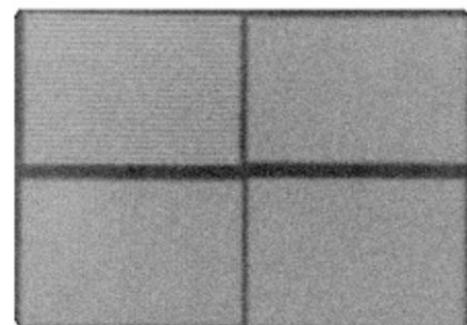


**Figure 2 relationships between acquisition time and matrix size**

Figure 3.1 to 3.5 shows the gradual improvement of image quality as the matrix size varied from 64x64 to 1024x1024 pixels at a constant object collimator distance and count density of 20mm and 20Mcts respectively.



**Figure 3.1 Matrix size of 64x64**



**Figure 3.2: Matrix size of 128x128**

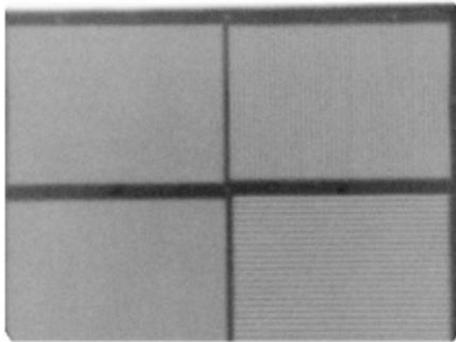


Figure 3.3: Matrix size of 256x256

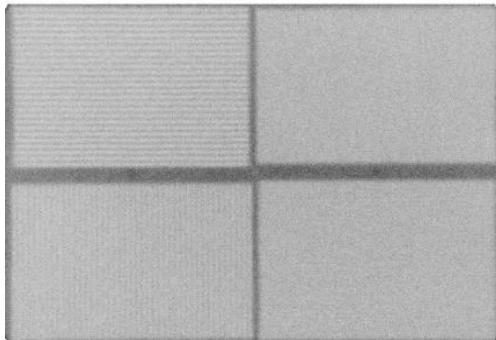


Figure 3.4: Matrix size of 512x512

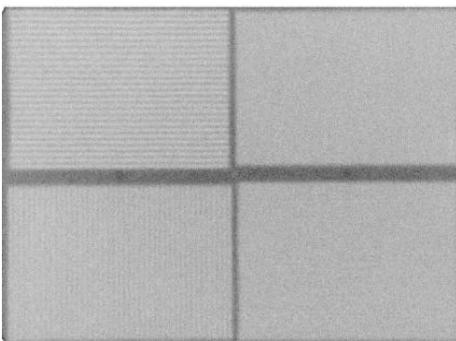


Figure 3.5: Matrix size

20	5.8	10.12
25	5.8	13.27
30	5.8	16.37
35	5.8	19.65

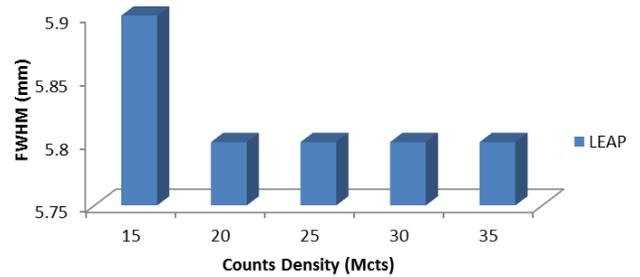


Figure 4: Variation between acquisition Count Density and FWHM

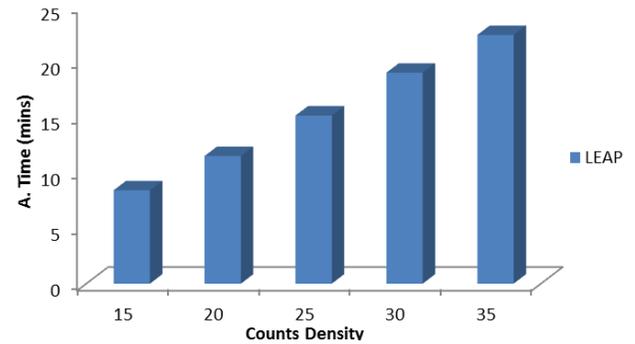


Figure 5: variation between count density and A. time

Figure 6.1 to 6.5 shows the gradual improvement of image quality as the count density varied from 15Mcts to 35Mcts at a constant matrix size and object collimator distance of 256X256 and 20mm respectively. Here, the lead strips show slight improvement in appearance from 15Mcts to 35Mcts.

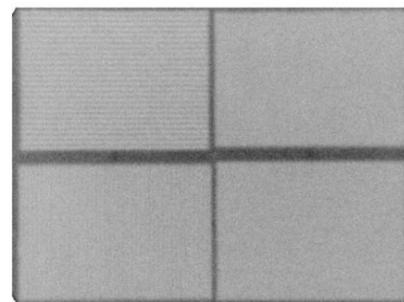


Figure 6.1 Count Density of 15 Mcts

## 4.2 Count Density

Table 2 shows data collected by keeping the matrix size and object-collimator distance constant at 256x256 pixels and 20mm respectively while varying the count density from 15 Mcts to 35 Mcts using the LEAP Collimator. Also, figure 4 and 5 represent variation of Count Density with FWHM and acquisition time.

Table 2: Acquisition count density variation with FWHM and Acquisition time for LEAP

Count Density (Mcts)	FWHM (mm)	Acquisition Time (mins)
15	5.9	7.27

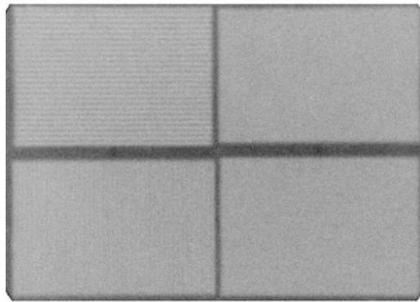


Figure 6.2 Count Density of 20 Mcts

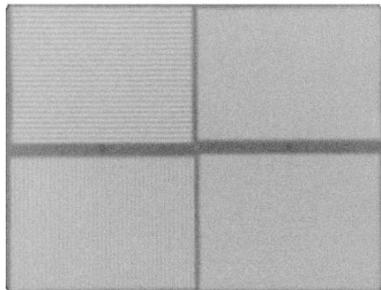


Figure 6.3 Count Density of 25 Mcts

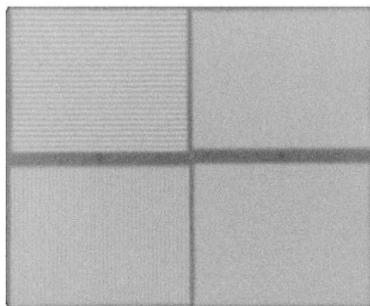


Figure 6.4 Count Density of 30 Mcts

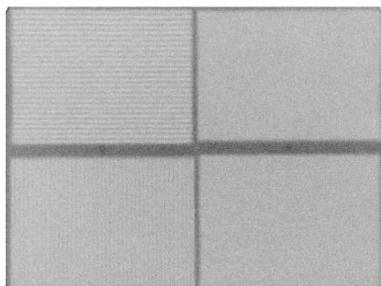


Figure 6.5 Count Density of 35 Mcts

## 5. OBJECT-COLLIMATOR DISTANCE

Table 3 shows data collected by keeping the count density and matrix size constant at 20 Mcts and 256x256 pixels while varying the Object-collimator distance from 0 mm to 80 mm using LEAP collimator. Figure 7 and 8 represent the variation of Object-Collimator and FWHM and acquisition

Table 3: Object-Collimator distance variation with FWHM and A. time for LEAP Collimator

Object-Collimator Distance (mm)	FWHM (mm)	Acquisition Time (mins)
0.00	5.00	12.36
20.00	6.00	13.17
40.00	7.00	15.45
60.00	7.10	16.11
80.00	7.20	18.57

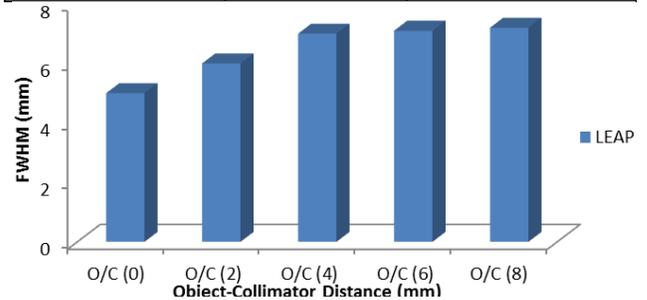


Figure 7: a variation of count density with Acquisition Time (A. Time)

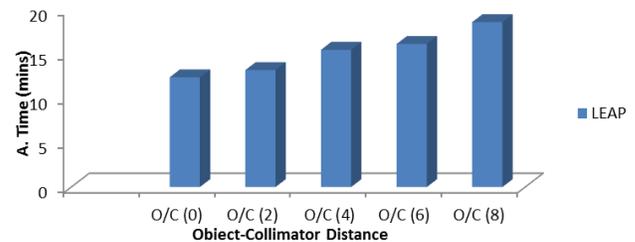


Figure 8: a variation between object-collimator distance and Acquisition Time (A. Time)

Figure 8.1 to 8.5 shows the gradual improvement of image quality as the object collimator distance varied from 80mm to 0mm at a constant matrix size and count density of 256x256 and 20Mcts.

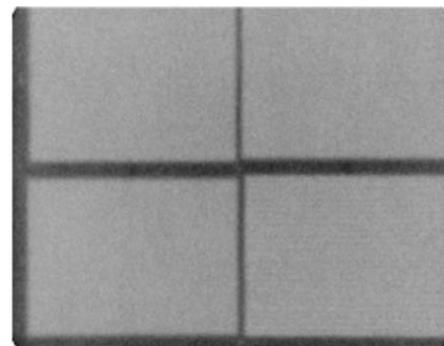


Figure 8.1 O/C Distance of 80mm

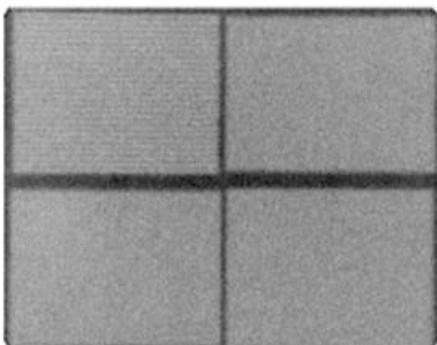


Figure 8.2 O/C Distance of 60mm

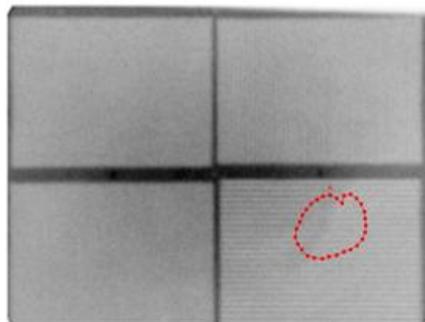


Figure 8.3 :O/C Distance of 40mm

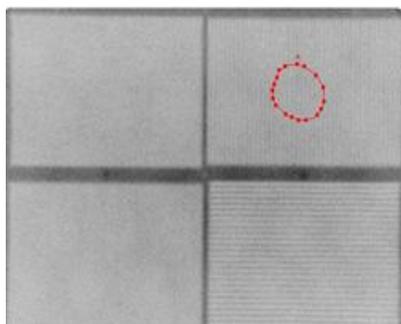


Figure 8.4 O/C Distance of 20mm

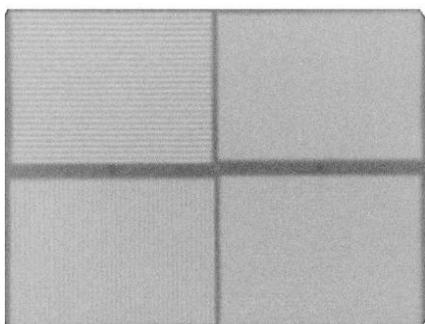


Figure 8.5 O/D Distance of 0mm

## 5.1 Matrix Size

In table 1 the variation of matrix size from 64x64 to 1024x1024 with constant count density and object-

collimator distance using Low energy High Resolution Collimator (LEAP) shows a gradual reduction in the value of FWHM from 6.8mm to 5.3mm as shown in figure 1 which indicates 28.3% improvement in resolution. Between the default matrix of 256x256 and the highest matrix size of 1024x1204 the FWHM Value decrease from 5.8mm to 5.3mm, which shows 11.3% improvement in resolution. The improvement in resolution is indicative of an improvement in the image quality as resolution indicates how best the camera system can distinguish or resolved between two closely placed sources. Hence a resolution of 5.3 mm is better than the resolution of 6.8 mm. Therefore, higher matrix size with smaller FWHM value has better resolution than lower matrix size with larger FWHM for all other conditions being constant.

Furthermore, the reason for this observation is because the larger the matrix size the smaller the pixel size (matrix size of 1024x1024 has a pixel size of 0.56) and the smaller the matrix size the larger the pixel size (matrix size of 64x64 has a pixel size of 4.48). Smaller pixel size enables the finer details in the image to be detected and hence will provide better image resolution.

However, higher matrix sizes resulted in an increase in the acquisition time. For instance, in figure 2 the acquisition time increases from 10.47minutes to 11.29minutes from an increase in matrix size of 256x256 to 1024x1024, this is an increase of 7.8% processing time. Also, when the matrix size was varied from the default setting to 512x512 matrix size the processing time increases by 5.9%. The result for the increase in matrix size from 256x256 to 512x512 is significant and can be adopted for use. This is because, even though there is corresponding increase in acquisition time when the matrix size was increase, the benefit of improved resolution of 9.5% outweighs the 5.9% increase in the additional time. Also, it is still within typical patient tolerances of acquisition times for approximately 30 to 45 minutes a realistic maximum for imaging [7]. Thus times per projection (stop) must be predicted on an appraisal of the patient's ability to remain still. Any significant motion of the patient during image acquisition may render the results unreadable.

## 5.2 Count Density

When the count density was varied from 15Mcts to 35Mcts with constant acquisition matrix size and object-collimator distance at 256x256 and 20mm respectively using LEAP, there was consistence little reduction in the value of FWHM from 5.9mm to 5.8mm as shown in Table 2, which is just about 1.7% improvement in resolution.

In other words, the effect of the change in the count density shows a little change in the value of the FWHM as

shown in figure 3, hence little change in the image quality. However there is a significantly increase in acquisition time from 7.27 to 16.37 minutes in figure 4 which saw over 125% increase in acquisition time. This increase in acquisition time is significant as this will affect the quality of the image. For instance very long scanning or processing time may result in (patient study) patient motion and other physiological issues. In patient studies for instance patient may be tired and stability problems may arise resulting in poor images. It may also be difficult to image those with psychiatry problems and infants due to stability issues. This justifies the theory that state that the number of photon received by the detector within a specified volume depends to the larger extends the design of the collimator and not the count density and or count-rate performance of a scintillation camera which describes the non-linearity in the relationship between the count rate and the intensity of incident (received) gamma radiation by the detector [8].

In other words the design of the collimator determined the number of photons that were received by the detector and also the energy and the availability of the radionuclide in a specified volume determine the count density. The flood-field uniformity or the response to uniform irradiation describes the degree of uniformity of count density in the image when the detector is “flooded” with a spatially uniform flux of incident gamma radiation.

Because of the above theoretical analysis, it is clear that count density has little effect on the quality of image produced. However, the count density depends largely on the design of the collimator.

## 6. OBJECT-COLLIMATOR DISTANCE

The object-collimator distances increases with decrease in resolution. In table 3 when the object-collimator distance was varied from 0mm to 80mm with respect to the bed height of 135mm at a constant matrix size and count density using LEAP, there was an increase in the FWHM values from 5.0 to 7.2mm as shown in figure 5. This shows poorer resolution as the object-collimator distance increases. In other words as the detector moves away from the object the ability of the detector to distinguish between two adjacent points (resolution) reduces. This means that the further an object from the detector the poorer the image that will be captured. Theoretically, resolution of the gamma camera degrades as the distance between the camera and object being imaged increases [8]. This is because certain fraction of gamma rays from an object is absorbed when they are emitted in an attenuating medium, such as a phantom or a patient. This phenomenon varies according to the depth of attenuating medium between the object and the gamma camera.

The closer the detector to the object the better the resolution and the farther the detector from the object the poorer the resolution [8]. In other words the smaller the object-collimator distance the better the detector detects the source of photons in the radioactive object and finer details of two adjacent objects can be recorded.

The study revealed that as the object-collimator distance increased from 0mm to 80mm FWHM values increased from 5.0mm to 7.2mm as shown in Table 3 and figure 5, which is 44% reduction in resolution, resulting in an increase in acquisition time from 12.36 mins to 18.57 mins as in Table 3 and figure 6, an increase of 30% processing time.

## 7. CONCLUSION

It is proposed that to achieve better resolution in gamma camera imaging, 512x512 matrix size should be used, object-collimator distance should be 20mm and count density should be 15-20 Mcts.

In patient study, patient motion occurring during data acquisition in SPECT cause serious artifacts. This is likely to happen when images are acquired at much longer time. Hence the acquisition time should be suitable for patient stability. About 15 to 25 minutes is recommended to be appropriate in obtaining patient images.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My sincere gratitude to the medical physics unit of the Department of Radiology, University of Texas, USA for the use of their research material on the statistical moment method published.

My sincere thanks also go to staff of the Department of Nuclear Medicine, Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital for their support and cooperation and also acknowledge the support of the head of department of Medical Physics, the school of Nuclear and allied sciences, University of Ghana, legon Professor A.N.K Kyere and the entire staff of the department.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Paras, P. “Performance and Quality Control of Nuclear Medicine Instrument”, in Medical Radionuclide Imaging. Proceedings of a symposium organized by IAEA in Co-operation with WHO, Heidelberg, 1980, IAEA, Vienna (1981). Vol. II.
- [2] Trish A. Hander, Jack L. Lancaster, David T. Kopp, John C. Lasher, Ralph Blumhardt, and Peter T. Fox. Department of Radiology, University of Texas. Rapid objective measurement of gamma camera resolution

using statistical moments. Volume 24, Issue 2, February 1997

- [3] Paras, P. Quality Assurance in Nuclear Medicine in Medical Radionuclide Imaging. Proceedings of IAEA symposium. Los Angeles, 1976, IAEA, Vienna, Austria, Pages 130- 143.
- [4] P. P Dendy et al An experimental study of the relationship between image quality and spatial resolution for the gamma camera. pages: 150-155.
- [5] P. S Soni et al Quality Control of Imaging Devices in Handbook of Nuclear Medicine Practice in Developing Countries. IAEA – Vienna, 1991. Page 95.
- [6] Gray J.E., Winker N.T., Stears J., and Frank E.D. Quality Control in Diagnostic Imaging: A Quality Control Handbook. University Park Press. Baltimore Maryland, (1983),pages 16 – 32.
- [7] International Atomic Energy Agency, Quality Control of Nuclear Medicine Instruments, IAEA-TECDOC-602, Vienna (1991). Pages; 15-19
- [8] NEMA. Performance measurements of scintillation cameras. Washington DC. National Electrical Manufacturers Association (NEMA), 1994, Standards Publication NU 1-1994. Pages 5-92