

COMMENTARY

LINES FROM THE PRESIDENT: RESTRUCTURING

ONE OF THE GOALS IN THE STRATEGIC PLAN of The Society of Nuclear Medicine is to “maintain an organization that is optimally responsive to the furtherance of nuclear medicine.” This is meant to assure that administrative and organizational structures are effective and responsive to the objectives of the Society and the needs of the membership.



Paul H. Murphy, PhD

The Strategic Planning Committee, the Executive Committee, and the Board of Trustees concur that our current organizational structure is cumbersome, complex, and inefficient. The Society needs to look closely at its many components and to redefine its structure to provide for more effective responses to internal and external demands. For that reason I appointed the Special Committee on Restructuring to analyze SNM organization with respect to similar associations and mindful of the future. In times of uncertainty—and these are clearly uncertain times for health care—flexibility maximizes an organization’s ability to respond effectively. The Society as currently structured is inflexible.

Chapters, Councils, and Sections

The components of the Society and their charges and responsibilities have evolved over time and are not necessarily consistent with our present needs or bylaws. Chapters, councils, sections, and a wide range of committees have in many cases assumed overlapping responsibilities. The Board of Trustees comprises more than 100 individuals representing a heterogenous membership. The governing body of the Society, with its complex composition and infrequent meetings, can be very inefficient in addressing the needs of the membership. Representation on the Board extends to the Technologist Section, chapters, Canadian members, past-presidents, and members elected at large—but not to one of the fastest growing components of the organization, the councils.

The SNM bylaws make no distinction between a section and a council in terms of members or mission. The chief distinction is size—it takes 1000 members to become a section and gain some autonomy in budgetary matters and representation on the Board. Should councils be able to evolve

into sections? Do councils and sections serve the same functions? Historically, councils assumed focused academic responsibilities, providing forums for small groups of members. Over time, councils have become more interested in financial independence, increased influence in setting policy, and designated participation in other SNM activities, such as the scientific program of the Annual Meeting. Prior to the cessation of financial subsidies to councils, there was a concern about their proliferation. The emphasis more recently is on supporting the formation of councils to broaden the horizons for nuclear medicine, while minimizing overlap in functions. Any restructuring plans should clarify the definition of a council, probably stressing the educational functions, but also addressing the potential that they may become not just special interest groups but political action committees.

Streamlining Committees

The bylaws define standing committees, special committees appointed by the president, special committees appointed by the board of trustees, and a variety of ad hoc committees and task groups. One challenge the Society faces is to streamline committee structure, while also accommodating widespread member participation in governance. The Society must ensure that adequate funding is available for the committees to accomplish their tasks. Most committees meet twice a year, at the Annual and Mid-Winter Meetings at which there are many competing activities and little opportunity to focus in depth on committee issues. Perhaps committees should meet at other times. All non-standing committees—which should be as few as possible—should have a finite lifetime and die under a sunset provision.

We have 15 chapters that function as microcosms of the Society. Although as a sub-group they function autonomously in their educational activities and local socioeconomic and political affairs. Some are incorporated separately from the Society, some span the Canadian border, and others are totally in Canada. Chapters vary in size from so small as to be effectively inactive, to large enough to conduct two very successful scientific meetings per year. The chapters are the conduit for most members to become active in the governing body of the Society. Although there are other mechanisms, the most effective way to get appointed to a committee and begin to participate at the Society level in governance is to be recommended by a

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NEWS BRIEFS

been extremely cautious in seeking new sources for ⁹⁹Mo.

The Peruvian agency views the circumstances as an opening to carve a small piece out of Nordion's market, or entice the Canadian company into a joint venture. (Nordion sent a team to visit the IPEN facilities, but sources say that the company has no interest in producing isotopes there.)

What the Peruvians have to offer is a versatile nuclear reactor that was built in 1989 by Argentina. The IPEN facilities include a waste treatment plant, numerous hot cells, and other equipment. IPEN pledges responsibility for final storage of nuclear wastes produced by the reactor. The IPEN reactor is only three years old and therefore, the Peruvians argue, more reliable and economical than the 36-year old reactor that the U.S. Department of Energy plans to use for medical radioisotope production. The DOE expects to begin producing ⁹⁹Mo at the Los Alamos National Laboratory this Spring.

In supplying ⁹⁹Mo, IPEN is prepared to irradiate targets and process the isotopes, or to send irradiated targets to the U.S. for processing. With some upgrading, Peruvian officials say they could even assemble technetium-99m generators for the regional market.

Under the terms proposed by the IPEN, the chosen partner would be responsible for covering the investment and operating costs, managing the IPEN facilities, and conducting the production and sale of radioisotopes. The partner would also assume the burden of processing radioactive wastes for disposal.

Industry sources say the Peruvian plan is hampered by the large capital investment that would be needed to upgrade waste processing capacity. Rory Allen, a senior economic and financial advisor with the United Nations who is advising Peruvian officials, says that IPEN calculations accommodate the needed capital investments for waste disposal.

Another discouragement to investors is the prospect of terrorist attacks. IPEN's Mr. Romani counters that terrorism is on the decline and points to the capture in September of the leader of Sendero Luminoso, the Maoist rebel force responsible for years of bombings and guerrilla raids. Mr. Romani also says IPEN maintains a security force adequate to guard the reactor facilities. Concerns have arisen about shipping highly enriched uranium (HEU) into a country wracked by armed insurrection (standard methods for producing ⁹⁹Mo require HEU). Mr. Romani says IPEN could adequately safeguard shipments. Having signed agreements with the Inter-

national Atomic Energy Agency, Peru is subject to annual safeguard inspections to prevent secret nuclear arms development.

In spite of the imposing hurdles before them, Peruvian officials say that they are confident in their plan and next year will consider exporting radioisotopes to North America independently if foreign investments fall through. ■

New Publications Director

John Childs, PhD, is the new director of publications at the central office of The Society of Nuclear Medicine in New York.

Before joining the SNM, Mr. Childs was director of special projects for the Aviation Week Group of McGraw-Hill in New York, where he served as managing editor of the group's aerospace publications, supervised electronic publishing, and assisted in producing educational videos.

He has been a consulting editor for Oxford University Press, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, and the University of Texas Press. He continues as executive editor of the Journal of Political Psychology. Mr. Childs holds a doctorate in English and was for 13 years a professor of poetry, American literature, and linguistics. He is author of books on Ezra Pound and on T.S. Eliot. ■

Lines From the President

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chapter. I recently had the pleasure of conversing with a member at a chapter meeting who lamented the hurdles to becoming active at the national level of our organization. She described our leadership as a herd of "dinosaurs" guarding the inner circle. She was unaware of how she might join committees and contribute to the leadership of the Society. I assured her that in my case, as with recent presidents, any request by a member for participation on committees is always considered and usually, if not always, granted; not necessarily on a specific committee, but on some committee. It is hard to believe that in an organization of almost 13,000 members it is sometimes difficult to

come up with enough people to serve, but in fact, based on my experience, it happens. Volunteer, and you will be appointed. Our structure is complex and our speed of response to challenges is slow. The Special Committee on Restructuring and I are analyzing the Society's organization and taking advantage of expert consultants. We will present our analysis and recommendations to the appropriate committees and the Board of Trustees at the Mid-Winter Meeting in Atlanta for discussion and feedback. This should result in refinements that can produce a proposal for action by the Board at our Annual Meeting in Toronto.

*Paul H. Murphy, PhD
President of The Society of Nuclear Medicine*