VA HOSPITALS FOSTER MAJOR ADVANCES IN NUCLEAR MEDICINE FIELD

According to many leaders in the field of nuclear medicine, the proposed elimination of the Director of the Nuclear Medicine Service at the U.S. Veterans Administration (VA) Central Office in Washington, DC, is ironic in light of the VA's prominent role in facilitating major advances in the specialty (see p. 553).

Joseph F. Ross, MD, president of the American Board of Nuclear Medicine (ABNM), said that "the VA nuclear medicine services are the most distinguished of all VA services in the delivery of patient care to United States veterans and in the development and advancement of diagnostic and therapeutic methodologies."

Dr. Ross also noted that the VA received a special award from the World Federation of Nuclear Medicine and Biology during its Second International Congress, held in 1978, for leadership in the field.

The inscription on the award reads: "In recognition of the unique foresight of the Veterans Administration—first to identify and foster the autonomy of nuclear medicine as a discipline promoting the welfare of mankind."

Referring to the internationally renowned reputations of many VA nuclear medicine physicians and scientists, Dr. Ross pointed out that they have been elected to high office in professional societies and serve on editorial boards of scientific journals.

Major medical contributions from VA physicians and scientists include:

- The development and clinical applications of the scintillation crystal radioactivity detector and the first automated scintillation imaging device for localizing radioactive materials in the human body, by Benedict Cassen, PhD, and Herbert Allen, MD, at the Wadsworth VA Medical Center in Los Angeles.
- The first clinical nuclear medicine textbook, which is used internationally as the classic standard text in the field, by William H. Blahd, MD, chief of nuclear medicine/ultrasound at the Wadsworth VA Medical Center in Los Angeles.
- The conception and development of radioimmunoassay, recognized by the 1977 Nobel Prize in physiology and medicine awarded to Rosalyn S. Yalow, PhD, for her work with the late Solomon Berson, MD, at the Bronx VA Hospital in New York.
- The first formally organized diagnostic and therapeutic nuclear medicine services, and the first formally organized training programs for nuclear medicine physicians, were instituted in VA hospitals.

"The development of nuclear medicine nationally and internationally has greatly benefited from the VA system where clinical nuclear medicine departments provided service at the cutting edge of the technology," said Robert M. Donati, MD, senior associate dean of the St. Louis University School of Medicine and chairman of the ABNM.

"Loss of an independent voice within the policy-making levels of the VA Central Office would seriously compromise the leadership and professional excellence of nuclear medicine throughout the VA hospital system," he added.

The VA Central Office Nuclear Medicine Service was established in 1947 at the direction of Gen. Omar Bradley, administrator for Veterans Affairs, and Paul Magnuson, chief medical director of the VA.