

Allied Health Moves Toward Multicompetency Training

NUCLEAR MEDICINE TECHNOLOGISTS FACE CHANGING ROLES IN FUTURE HEALTH CARE

With the advent of the Prospective Payment System (PPS) in the United States, reducing the numbers of diagnostic and therapeutic procedures performed in hospitals, the demand for allied health care workers has decreased. Nuclear medicine technologists face more competition for job openings and an expansion of their job responsibilities into other areas.

Multicompetency Training

Multicompetency training for allied health professionals seems to be of great interest now under PPS. This idea began initially to help small rural hospitals use personnel more efficiently, but it has taken hold today in outpatient centers and larger medical institutions.

One program in the School of Community and Allied Health at the University of Alabama, funded by a Kellogg Foundation grant, has a multicompetency clinical technician program which trains students for two years in nursing skills, medical technology, X-ray procedures, emergency room situations, patient education, and office skills. Nurses are also receiving training in medical technologies, and will combine these skills with their nursing duties.

Many nuclear medicine technologists today already have job responsibilities in other areas. According to a survey conducted in 1984 by The Society of Nuclear Medicine's (SNM) Technologist Section, nuclear medicine technologists also work in diagnostic radiology, ultrasound, X-ray computed tomography, special

procedures in radiology, radiation therapy, clinical laboratory procedures, and nuclear magnetic resonance imaging (1).

Another significant change is the growth of diagnostic imaging centers. In a recent study by Dean Witter Reynolds, Inc., of 1,500 hospitals, 30% had established a joint venture with an outside imaging center, and 26% were planning such an arrangement. It is estimated that 260 imaging centers exist or are under development today, and that this number will escalate to 1,600–2,000 by the end of the decade.

Congress Looks at Allied Health

The US Government has not been as concerned with the role of allied health professionals as it has been with that of physicians in the health care delivery system. This situation, however, may change in the near future.

President Ronald Reagan signed the Health Professions Training Assistance Act of 1985 last October calling for a national survey of allied health personnel. The new law calls for the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to have the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) assess the role of allied health, investigate current licensing, credentialing, and accreditation practices, and recommend any legislative or administrative action necessary for allied health to meet projected needs in health care.

The HHS is required to submit this report to Congress by October 1, 1987. The SNM Technologist Section

will be monitoring this study, and will provide information to the NAS on nuclear medicine technologists.

Effects of PPS

The Technologist Section is conducting its own study of the effects of PPS on nuclear medicine. About 4,400 nuclear medicine facilities were surveyed, and preliminary results from the first 1,000 respondents indicate that the volume of inpatient nuclear medicine procedures decreased by 67%, whereas the volume of outpatient procedures increased by 60%.

According to 54% of the respondents, hospitals are now demanding nuclear medicine productivity standards, and 45% say that there is increased scrutiny of documentation procedures. Some technologists commented that they are now required to do procedures faster. In addition, 73% of the surveyed facilities have begun a marketing effort, and 85% reported the implementation of cost-accounting systems.

With the comprehensive shifts occurring today within the health care delivery system, nuclear medicine will have to adapt to the new environment and educate other medical professionals on the value of nuclear medicine in order to ensure that it will remain a strong specialty.

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References

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