

## VETERANS ADMINISTRATION APPOINTS NEW DIRECTOR OF NUCLEAR MEDICINE SERVICE

The US Veterans Administration (VA) Department of Medicine and Surgery has announced the appointment of James W. Fletcher, MD, of the St. Louis VA Medical Center, as director of the VA Nuclear Medicine Service. The position was formerly held by James J. Smith, MD, who has assumed responsibilities as chief of the Nuclear Medicine Service at the Washington VA Medical Center.

The VA Nuclear Medicine Service program provides direction for patient care, education, and research in concert with local service chiefs in the 130 VA medical centers throughout the United States that have onsite nuclear medicine services. Dr. Fletcher's appointment follows a seven-month period of concern by many individuals and the leadership of professional nuclear medicine organizations over the possible transfer of those responsibilities to the director of the VA Radiology Service as a first step toward establishing a Department of Imaging (see *Newsline*: June 1985, p. 553-554; July 1985, p. 693; Dec. 1985, pp. 1360-1361).

As projected, the VA did maintain the position of director of the VA Nuclear Medicine Service and, in line with the VA's effort to decentralize programs and place directors closer to clinical settings, Dr. Fletcher will direct the program from St. Louis.

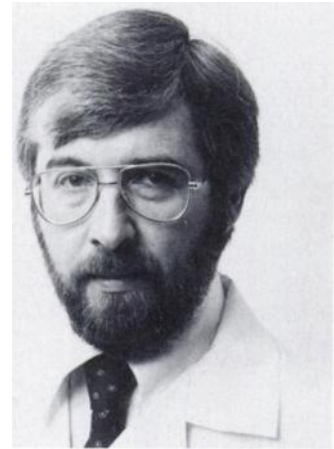
"It is hoped that this reorganization, which is the first for a medium-sized professional service, will provide a model for future decentralization of other professional services within the VA medical system," said Dr. Fletcher. This decentralization has already taken effect with the VA

directors of several of the smaller-sized services.

To assist Dr. Fletcher in operating the decentralized program, he has appointed seven physicians to newly created positions as associate directors for the VA Nuclear Medicine Service in the VA's existing geographic regions: Region 1—Walton W. Shreeve, MD, PhD, Northport, NY; Region 2—John R. Hansell, MD, Philadelphia, PA; Region 3—Johnny W. Scott, PhD, MD, Birmingham, AL; Region 4—Ervin Kaplan, MD, Chicago, IL; Region 5—Naomi Alazraki, MD, Salt Lake City, UT; Region 6—William H. Bland, MD, Los Angeles, CA; Region 7—Theodore R. Simon, MD, Dallas, TX. "These associate directors will be available to the chiefs of nuclear medicine in their regions to provide consultation and assistance on professional and administrative matters," said Dr. Fletcher.

Although he would not comment specifically at this time on the concept of an Imaging Service, Dr. Fletcher indicated that "a strong emphasis needs to be placed on developing a basis for the intelligent, efficient, and appropriate utilization of all diagnostic studies." He also said that this goal necessitates a unique consultative interaction between primary care physicians and physician experts "who are not only familiar with the performance characteristics, indications, and limitations of diagnostic procedures, but who are also qualified and comfortable in dealing with a complex patient database."

The traditional consultative nature of nuclear medicine will facilitate its successful participation in what has to be a multi-disciplinary effort to coordinate clinical information, from



James W. Fletcher, MD

procedure selection, sequencing, and performance to the evaluation and communication of results," said Dr. Fletcher. The emphasis should be on resolving the patient's problem and using the entire database available—"not just the image data or the lab result per se," he added.

Dr. Fletcher, 42, received his MD degree from the St. Louis University School of Medicine and, following post-graduate training there and at Harvard Medical School, was certified by the American Board of Nuclear Medicine. He has been with the VA Department of Medicine and Surgery since 1972, was formerly the medical director of the Nuclear Medicine Computer Network at the St. Louis VA, and currently is acting director of the Division of Nuclear Medicine at the St. Louis University School of Medicine, where he is professor of medicine and radiology. Dr. Fletcher is also the chairman of The Society of Nuclear Medicine (SNM) Academic Council and secretary/treasurer of the SNM Correlative Imaging Council. ■