U.S. Navy Started Early Technologist Training Program, Alumni Meet in Bethesda

The US Navy established one of the very first schools for "radioactive isotope technicians" in 1949, contributing about 1,000 enlisted members of the Navy, Army, and Air Force to the ranks of nuclear medicine technologists in the United States.

The military offered formal training in nuclear medicine technology when very few nuclear medicine departments existed and most technologists were trained on the job. During The Society of Nuclear Medicine's (SNM) Annual Meeting this month in Washington, DC, alumni of the military training program are invited to a tour and reception at the Bethesda Naval Medical Command (Tues., June 24, 5:00).

When the Naval Hospital in Bethesda, MD, established the Radioisotope Branch of the Department of Radiology in 1948, the Navy recognized that it needed to provide training for technicians using radioactive materials. The original program, called the Radioisotope Technic Course, required eight months of training, with didactic courses followed by clinical experience.

In 1972, the Navy program in Bethesda made major curriculum changes, increasing didactic training to 16 weeks and clinical training to 36 weeks at various tri-service hospitals. That same year, the name was changed to the Clinical Nuclear Medicine Technic School, and it received accreditation from the Committee on Allied Health Education and Accreditation (CAHEA) and formally affiliated with George Washington University.

John C. Hergenrother, CNMT, chief technologist at Massachusetts General Hospital, graduated from the Navy program in 1967, and was its director from 1974 to 1978.

More Nonimaging Procedures

One interesting difference between technologists in military hospitals (as well as most Veterans Administration hospitals) and those at civilian institutions, he noted, is that their work generally entails more nonimaging studies.

This pattern might reflect the era in which the nuclear medicine department was established, said Mr. Hergenrother. Nonimaging applications (or "wet-work" studies, blood and urine analysis) were much more prevalent in nuclear medicine in the 1950s and 1960s than imaging. In civilian hospitals, many nonimaging procedures are performed in medical laboratories and pathology departments.

Since October 17, 1949, the Bethesda Navy program has taught 81 classes, with 470 graduates from the Navy, 249 from the Army, 135 from the Air Force, and 53 nonmilitary.

"The military actually played a major role in pioneering nuclear medicine," said Donald H. Manley, CNMT, of the Washington Hospital Center. Mr. Manley, who directed the Bethesda Navy program from 1970 to 1974, is organizing the tri-service alumni meeting, which will include a tour of the Nuclear Medicine Clinic at the Bethesda Naval Hospital, followed by a reception at the Petty Officers Club.

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(continued from page 754)

these developments that encourage scientific and educational exchanges among its members from diverse locales and with a variety of professional interests.

Finally, this is my opportunity to thank the many people who have helped me during the past year. They are truly too numerous to mention. It is restating the obvious to say that the Society accomplishes its goals through the dedicated work of many members and staff. I do have a special word of praise for our talented executive director, Henry L. Ernstthal, and for our Washington representative, Robert Wilbur. They have truly been invaluable. Many of my predecessors have stated that the happiest days of the presidency are the first day in office and the last day in office. As for me, I have rather enjoyed it. It has indeed been a privilege to have been chosen for the honor and responsibility of this position. Philip O. Alderson, MD, and his Scientific Program Committee have prepared an outstanding program for our 33rd Annual Meeting this month in Washington, DC. I hope to see you all there!

Stanley J. Goldsmith, MD
President
The Society of Nuclear Medicine