
COMMENTARY

LINES FROM THE PRESIDENT: EXPANDING THE THERAPEUTIC APPLICATIONS OF NUCLEAR MEDICINE

ONE OF THE PRIMARY CONCERNS I expressed upon assuming the presidency of The Society of Nuclear Medicine was the need for nuclear physicians to reaffirm a commitment to the use of unsealed sources in clinical medicine, especially in the treatment of malignant diseases. A heightened interest on the part of so highly trained a group of medical specialists would accelerate the development of these techniques and their application to patient care. The absence of such a commitment would be disloyal to our obligation to apply our knowledge, experience, and discipline toward the optimal medical treatment of our patients. The Society has established a committee under the chairmanship of Aldo N. Serafini, MD, FACC to assume the job of fostering therapy with unsealed sources. That committee has already begun its planning process and held an in-depth discussion of the issue at the SNM Mid-Winter Meeting in February. By reviewing the preliminary objectives and plan of that committee, I hope to generate interest among our membership in pursuing this promising therapeutic modality.



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Appropriate Domain for Nuclear Medicine

Physicians who are certified by the American Board of Nuclear Medicine (ABNM) have the necessary qualifications to practice our specialty, which explicitly includes administering "therapy with unsealed radionuclides." The qualifying examination of the ABNM has always included a number of questions about the use of radionuclides for therapeutic purposes.

It should come as no surprise then that we have always been the specialists who are responsible for the administration of unsealed radioactive material for therapeutic purposes. Nuclear medicine specialists have used radioisotopes for the successful treatment of a variety of malignant and benign disorders. Generally classified as unsealed sources, these isotopes are administered orally, intravenously, intra-arterially, intrathecally, and intracavitarily. The majority of therapeutic nuclear medicine has been directed at benign and malignant disorders of the thyroid, but radionuclide therapies exist for disorders of other organ systems and the potential for new therapeutic applications of unsealed sources barely has been tapped.

Most promising are the advances in the development of radionuclide delivery systems—monoclonal antibodies, liposomes, peptides, and receptors that can be mated with radionuclides and administered to treat malignant disorders. It is essential that The Society of Nuclear Medicine assume a leadership role in the development of these methods. As a society, our efforts should be characterized by innovative research projects and continuing clinical education to support the use of unsealed radionuclides.

Objectives of the Committee

The Committee on Therapy with Unsealed Sources has four preliminary objectives:

- Identifying current resources and expertise within The Society.
- Soliciting research funding.
- Establishing education programs for our membership.
- Identifying future needs.

The committee plans to involve academic centers, government laboratories, hospitals, private practitioners, and other physicians and scientists with specific interests in the field. A faculty of those with interest and experience in the area will develop continuing medical education programs to be presented at national and regional meetings. Potential sponsors for continuing education programs include The Society, the American College of Nuclear Physicians, industry, and federal sources.

The committee will seek support for resident and fellowship training in the clinical therapeutic applications of radioisotopes, for funding of young investigators, for research in the development of new therapeutic radiopharmaceuticals, and for funding program projects specifically for the therapeutic applications of unsealed sources and radioconjugates.

New radiopharmaceuticals, the rapid development of SPECT, the present and future promise of PET, and the potential for successful treatment of tumors with unsealed sources—all are indications of a medical discipline that is ever more intellectually stimulating and of ever increasing clinical relevance. It is our responsibility to make certain that these applications of nuclear medicine will improve patient outcome and longevity. To be less than enthusiastic about the opportunities—including therapy with unsealed sources—would be to betray the trust placed in us as nuclear medicine specialists.

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