Novel Networks Edge up Profits

Struggling to remain competitive in these tough economic times, some radiopharmaceutical companies have decided to form unique partnerships with radiopharmacies. Last month, Medi-Physics, Inc., the U.S. health care arm of the British company, Amersham International announced that it had established a distributorship network with Mallinckrodt Medical, Inc. and Geodax Technologies, Inc. Medi-Physics will distribute its product lines from Mallinckrodt's 35 radiopharmacies and Geodax's 5 radiopharmacies in addition to its own 23 sites. (The network is one way: Mallinckrodt and Geodax won't use Medi-Physics' pharmacies to distribute their products.)

"We hope this will make us more competitive in the marketplace by making more radiopharmacies available to hospitals throughout the country," said William Ehmig, vice president for professional affairs at Medi-Physics, Inc., in Arlington Heights, IL. Medi-Physics will be distributing eight of its proprietary products at the new sites, including Metastron®, Ceretec®, and Indiclor™.

Cost and efficacy are the main advantages to setting up a distributorship over building new radiopharmacies. "With a distributorship," said Ehmig, "we have access to more sites without having to lease space, hire radiopharmacists and get the proper licenses." Many nuclear physicians who normally order their prescriptions directly from Medi-Physics can benefit from the new network. With the 40 new sites, Medi-Physics will have a local pharmacy in most major cities. Instead of having to wait a day for an order to be filled, physicians can receive their prescriptions within a few hours, according to Ehmig.

As the competition grows fiercer, more radiopharmaceutical companies may begin to establish similar networks. In fact, Medi-Physics wasn't the first to enter into a distributorship agreement. Syncor International Corporation and Dupont Merck Pharmaceutical Company created such an agreement seven years ago and recently expanded it to include bulk as well as proprietary products.

effect of reducing hospital stays and shifting care to the outpatient setting. If the studies do not demonstrate these economic benefits, then clearly some procedures will have no chance of survival.

4. Quicker reimbursement: Reimbursement policies must be addressed much earlier in the product development process so that new products and techniques can be introduced with fewer administrative delays.

5. Generic pricing: When generic products are able to demonstrate their cost/benefit performance, they should be priced to provide an acceptable profit margin for their manufacturers.

6. LLW disposal: Cooperative steps must be taken to resolve common industry issues, such as radioactive waste disposal and dependable supplies of strategic materials (e.g. ^{99}Mo). In tackling these six strategic initiatives, those of us involved in nuclear medicine must recognize that manufacturers and suppliers place profit and return on investment at the top of their list of priorities. To ensure the growth of the nuclear medicine field, companies must give earning targets equal weight with medical efficacy and cost containment.

Some difficult challenges lie ahead for all the players in this industry. If we consolidate our efforts and focus on a handful of strategic goals, we can make progress and enable the nuclear medicine industry to survive. Together, we can build a stronger future and continue to deliver nuclear medicine's diagnostic and therapeutic benefits to patients.

Peter C. Vermeeren

Mr. Vermeeren is the Chairperson of the Corporate Committee of the American College of Nuclear Physicians and is the Senior Vice President at Mallinckrodt Medical Incorporated.

News Briefs

Nuclear Medicine Company Merger

On December 19, 1994, two nuclear medicine companies, Sopha Medical of France and Summit Nuclear, the parent company of Summit World Trade in Ohio, formally announced their merger to form a new nuclear medicine corporation. The new, as of yet unnamed, conglomerate hopes to expand upon the 20 percent market share already controlled by the two parent companies and increase revenue beyond their combined 1994 sales of $100 million.

The merger will place the new company among the ten largest nuclear medicine companies that control the lionshare of the world market. The conglomerate will continue to market existing product lines which include 1400 gamma cameras and 2500 nuclear medicine computers. It will also focus on the production of new single-and-dual-head detector technologies and ring gantry cameras which the two parent companies have developed individually in the past six months, according to Lonnie Mixon, Director of Marketing for Sopha Medical. André Debionne, currently the general manager of Innolion, a capital venture of the French bank Credit Lyonnais, has been named Chairman and CEO of the new company. Aside from his responsibilities at Innolion, Debionne has been responsible for the operation of Sopha Medical's American subsidiary in Columbia, MD. ■

NMTCB Improves Testing Strategy

The Nuclear Medicine Technology Certification Board (NMTCB) has been certifying nuclear medicine technologists since 1977. To increase access to the examination and provide quicker test results, the NMTCB recently decided to pursue computer-based testing and plans to implement it in 1996. This new system will open up more test sites for the examination since many universities and private businesses have extensive computer labs which can be used for professional testing services. Examinees will be able to take the test on the day of their choosing and will receive results within one to two weeks rather than the current four to six weeks.

The exam will implement computer-adaptive testing, which varies the length

of the exam based on each examinee's ability to answer the questions. If questions of medium difficulty are answered correctly, the computer will skip the easier questions and go straight to the harder ones.

Although certification by NMTCB is optional, many hospitals and institutions require their technologists to be certified to ensure that they have the requisite body of skills and knowledge for professional practice. In 1994, the NMTCB certified 1367 technologists (three-quarters of the examinees pass on their initial attempt). To keep the exam updated, the NMTCB surveys working technologists every few years on which material to include on the exam. Since exam questions are developed by technologists, they are designed to test the skills and knowledge that practicing technologists deem important.

Besides improving the certification exam, James E. Green, Jr., PhD, the executive director of NMTCB, and his colleagues are currently addressing health care issues on the state and local level. Although the NMTCB has not been lobbying Congress, it has joined forces with the Society of Nuclear Medicine-Technologists Section to enforce the importance of certified technologists and their contribution to patient care. ■

Coronary Heart Disease Training Program Launched

Although heart disease is the number one killer of women, doctors are still missing opportunities for early and accurate detection. Thus, many women with heart disease go undiagnosed and untreated. In an effort to solve this problem, the American Medical Women's Association (AMWA) began a three-year education project on coronary heart disease in women last August.

The first stage of the project trained a master faculty of 31 internists and cardiologists to perform continuing medical education (CME) workshops on risk factors, prevention, diagnostic evaluation and treatment strategies of coronary heart disease. These workshops, already in progress, are specifically geared to women patients, focusing on their unique symptoms and needs. For instance, physicians need to recognize that on average female patients are ten years older than males, said project leader and AMWA vice-president, Debra R. Judelson, MD.

Moreover, physicians will be taught that certain diagnostic screening tests like the EKG, which are reliable predictors in men, are frequently inaccurate in women. Judelson said the workshops discuss thallium scanning as a more reliable alternative for women.

Master faculty members will train about 100 medical colleagues (particularly primary care physicians) over the next year using slides, videotapes, handout bibliographies and other materials provided by AMWA. "The ripple effect created by this program will result in thousands of physicians who are trained to recognize risk factors and diagnose heart disease in women and to educate their patients on prevention," Judelson said.

Within the next year, AMWA will offer regional training programs to physicians affiliated with various medical associations such as the American Medical Association and the American Society of Internal Medicine. For information on workshop locations, contact Jennifer Butera, AMWA, 801 North Fairfax Street, Suite 400, Alexandria, VA 22314, (703) 838-0500. ■

Announcements and Awards

★ For the first time in the history of the Japanese Society of Nuclear Medicine, the annual meeting's international sessions will offer oral presentations in English including proffered papers and educational lectures. The meeting will be held in Yokohama City, Japan on October 4-6, 1995. The Japanese Society strongly encourages submissions of papers from abroad as well as from Japan. For more details please contact: Yasuhito Sasaki, MD, President; The Japanese Society of Nuclear Medicine; The 35th Annual Meeting; c/o Department of Radiology, Faculty of Medicine; The University of Tokyo; 7-3-1 Hongo, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo, 113, Japan. Facsimile: 81-3-5689-8218. Telephone: 81-3-3815-5411 ext. 3660

★The Radiological Society of North America, at their annual meeting last November, awarded its highest honor, the Gold Medal Award, to Rosalyn S. Yalow, PhD, who is the chief of the Radioimmunoassay Reference Laboratory and director of the Solomon A. Berson Research Laboratory at the Veterans Administration Medical Center in the Bronx, NY. Yalow is a physicist by training, but her contributions to nuclear medicine are legendary. Among the many honors bestowed upon her, Yalow received the Nobel Prize in 1977 for her work in physiology. She is a fellow of the New York Academy of Science and a member of a number of other organizations including the Society of Nuclear Medicine. Yalow is currently co-editor of Hormone and Metabolite Research and a member of the editorial board of Diabetes.