

IS SNM SERVING THE NEEDS OF ITS SCIENTISTS?



**Robert Henkin,
MD**

YES. I would agree that over the past four or five years the Society has expanded its emphasis from pure science and education to additional areas of focus such as socioeconomic issues. That has been a response to the threat that health care reform was going to potentially make nuclear medicine less viable than it was in the past. Scientists, however, will benefit if nuclear medicine grows and becomes more viable.

Twenty years ago, nuclear medicine was desperate for new things, and money was coming in to fund basic science from both research grants and medical schools. Nuclear medicine could not have grown into a high-tech specialty without this research. The Society of Nuclear Medicine now must be concerned with the health of nuclear medicine overall. Health care managers are questioning whether nuclear physicians are relevant to medicine. Society members must spend the money and the time to answer these questions, or we may be told our specialty is obsolete.

To retain what we think is our rightful place in medicine, our spending on socioeconomic issues has gone from next to nothing to a fair sum of money. If you look at the government affairs operation, 15 or 20 years ago we were spending under \$20,000 a year, and we're now spending \$175,000 a year. But we're also encountering a tremendous growth in government regulation and less government funding.

I disagree with the basic scientists who feel our government affairs expenditures don't involve them. Part of what the Society invests in its Washington office goes to benefit the scientists directly. For example, the DOE supplies \$40 million a year for nuclear medicine research. Without our political efforts, that money would dry up. Even those issues that don't affect researchers directly—

(Continued on page 44N)



**Michael J. Welch,
PhD**

NO. Leaders of the Society of Nuclear Medicine are devoting more and more of their efforts to socioeconomic issues which are largely of interest to U.S. physicians. Health care policy, government relations, practice guidelines and public relations have become major priorities, yet these committees serve few benefits to basic scientists. The Society has greatly deviated from what I feel are its major missions—

namely running a scientific meeting and publishing a journal.

I have the sense that the course of the Washington office has changed in recent years from advancing research efforts to addressing socioeconomic issues. The Department of Energy (DOE) is currently making final decisions about whether to go ahead with the National Biomedical Tracer Facility (NBTF), a proposed linear accelerator that is vital for basic research. It's my sense that the Washington Office is putting a lot less effort into convincing DOE of the necessity of the NBTF compared to 6 or 7 years ago.

This shift in priorities is having some significant effects on the attitudes of basic scientists. Some basic scientists have become so disenchanted that they've decided not to seek out elected positions. For example, Michael Zalutsky, PhD, was president-elect of the Radiopharmaceutical Science Council during 1994-95. After serving his term, Michael declined to serve as president mainly because he felt the direction of the Society had changed dramatically. (*Zalutsky said he chose not to pursue his position because he found research priorities were being put on the back burner in relation to socioeconomic concerns.*)

What brought the whole socioeconomic-versus-science debate to a head recently was last year's dues increase of \$50 for all members. Many basic scientists think the dues increase went mainly

(Continued on page 44N)

BOTTOM LINE

- In its 1993-94 budget, SNM spent just 3.5 % of its expenses on government relations services. The largest expenditures in the Society's budget are for publication, membership and meeting services. Together, these three categories comprise nearly 85% of yearly expenses.
- Although the 1995 dues increase of \$50 was relatively large, it was the first such increase in four years. According to the financial department, the dues increase was necessary to cover the decline in membership and exhibitors' fees at the Annual Meeting.
- Of 12,600 SNM members, 1275 members are scientists.
- Physicians and scientists seem to agree that the Society's priorities are shifting, but some are divided over whether the shift is for the better or for the worse. It's not clear just how much spending on government affairs and health care policy issues directly or indirectly benefits basic scientists. What is for certain, however, is that physi-

cians, scientists, technologists and industry representatives need each other to survive as professionals. Actions that benefit one group of SNM members are bound to benefit the others.

We hope the reader finds this point-counterpoint discussion stimulating. It is our intent that debate of issues will allow the diverse membership within the Society to consider alternate viewpoints. Only then can we develop better approaches to be used with greater resolve in the application of nuclear techniques to benefit mankind. There may be less difference in our views than we think. Dr. Welch, for example, seems less against government affairs than the prioritization of issues covered by the government affairs office. Only with input from our members can the SNM leaders make decisions that advance the contributions of nuclear medicine to medicine and science.

*Conrad E. Nagle, MD, Associate Editor,
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NEWS BRIEF

An Internet Link to Congress

If you're connected to the Internet, you can now have a direct hook-up to Congressional happenings. You can access the Congressional Record, text of bills, pending amendments, U.S. Code and committee schedules through either the House Information Service or the Library of Congress. Once you get to the home page or menu, the best way to find information on a topic in nuclear medicine is to click on a category in the index such as "Congressional Record" and

then enter search words such as "FDA," "NRC," "HMOs" or "health care." You can also enter a Congressman's or committee's name or the date of the legislation. Note: your search may not take you to your desired destination all the time. It is more a matter of trying various key words and browsing to see if a particular item is available. Here is how to get the information you need.

- You can get to the House Information Service home page through the Web at <http://www.house.gov>. You can also access it through Gopher at gopher.house.gov or

through Wais at wais.house.gov.

- You can access Library of Congress on the Web at <http://thomas.loc.gov>; or at <http://marvel.loc.gov>.

- To get to the FDA, key in <http://vm.cssan.fda.gov>.

- A good place to hunt around for Federal regulations and policy information is the White House Internet address at <http://www.whitehouse.gov>.

- Cannot find the government information you need? You can get a list of government addresses on the Web by keying in <http://info.er.usgs.gov/gils/index.html>.

OVERHEARD

The Department of Energy (DOE) announced in May that it will reduce its workforce by 3788 employees, or 27%, over the next five years. Secretary Hazel R. O'Leary said the plan would save an estimated \$1.7 billion, and accompanying initiatives would further save \$12.7 billion. These cuts come on the heels of a push by congressional Republicans to abolish the agency and signify O'Leary's determination to save the DOE.

—The Washington Post

When pharmaceutical representatives discuss new drugs with doctors, they give false information 11% of the time that contradicts the *Physician's Desk Reference*, drug company brochures or medical journals, according to a recent study. Inaccurate statements were more likely to cast the promoted drug in a favorable light.

—The University of San Diego Medical Center

Massachusetts universities have a "cavalier" attitude toward the handling and disposal of radioactive material, says an NRC inspector. Spills of radioactive liquid have gone unreported and undetected for days. And radioactive material has been illegally thrown into the trash. Harvard University has been cited at least 8 times during the last 10 years for violating NRC regulations, but Harvard says it has since tightened its procedures.

—Documents from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission

Scientists have created a new kind of superconducting film that can carry 100 times more current than any material of its kind. It may speed development of hyper-tech devices such as nuclear magnetic resonance imaging devices the size of a toaster. The film conducts a whopping million amperes per square centimeter.

—Los Alamos National Laboratory

Henkin (Continued from page 34N)

such as the RBRVS Nuclear Medicine Update Study concerning Medicare reimbursements—can still have an impact on basic research. In this country, most medical schools derive from 40 to 70% of their research budgets from clinical revenue. If clinical revenue decreases, there will be less research.

The Society isn't abandoning basic science, but the shift in its philosophy is one that is unavoidable. To ensure that nuclear scientists as well as physicians are employed in the future, we need to pay more attention to areas that we used to ignore. If we spend less money on governmental, public relations and health care policy issues, we're going to find that we cannot continue to hold our position when competing with other imaging modalities and other medical specialties as a whole.

Robert Henkin, MD, is a professor of radiology and director of nuclear medicine at Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood, IL. He is beginning his term of Vice-President of the Society of Nuclear Medicine.

Welch (Continued from page 34N)

toward funding the socioeconomic activities of the Society. I'm worried these large dues increases will splinter the profession by further alienating basic scientists. One of the major strengths of the field of nuclear medicine has been the strong relationship between physicians and basic scientists that has been fostered by SNM.

One suggestion, which I am in favor of, is for SNM to initiate a new membership category with a separate dues structure for non-U.S. physician members. This should be with the understanding that a fraction of membership dues goes toward activities that have no bearing on basic scientists or physicians who practice outside the U.S., another group of members who feel their needs aren't being addressed by the Society.

Michael J. Welch, PhD, is a professor of radiology at Mallinckrodt Institute of Radiology in St. Louis. He served as President of the Society of Nuclear Medicine in 1984-85.