

Education and Research Foundation: Investing in the Future

Volunteerism Beyond The Call of Duty

By *Abass Alavi, MD*

Of all the issues facing the nuclear medicine specialty today, and in the foreseeable future, none is more serious than the shortage of qualified manpower to maintain high standards of practice, conduct innovative research and educate future generations of physician scientists. Optimal utilization of recent developments in nuclear medicine, such as PET and complicated therapeutic interventions, requires highly skilled physicians and scientists. The nuclear medicine specialty has seen a continuing decline in the number of qualified and motivated individuals who wish to enter the field. This trend is threatening the very foundation of nuclear medicine.

Participation in the field of nuclear medicine is one of the main goals of the Society of Nuclear Medicine's (SNM) Education and Research (E&R) Foundation. Established in the late 1960s, the E&R Foundation has strived to attract new physicians and scientists into the nuclear medicine field by providing student fellowships, pilot project funds and other grants. The Foundation has made a substantial investment in building strong manpower for the future.

Many SNM members and nuclear medicine leaders have heavily influenced the accomplishments of this vital organization. I, however, know of no one whose efforts have so dramatically affected the mission and scope of E&R Foundation activities as much as those of Bill and Mitzi Blahd. Their complete dedication and tireless efforts over the past two and a half decades nurtured the seeds of a new organization into the flourishing foundation that exists today.

As an outstanding educator and highly successful academician, Bill Blahd, MD, has contributed immensely to the field of nuclear medicine over the past four decades. He helped build the specialty by editing a major textbook, serving as SNM President in 1977 and providing outstanding training to many individuals, who, in turn, have become major national figures.

Dr. Blahd has served the Society in many other capacities including being a member of the Board of Trustees, serving on the editorial board for *The Journal of Nuclear Medicine*, and serving as chairman of the Publication Committee, the Awards Committee, and the Council of Correlated Imaging Modalities. He also was chairman of the board of the American Board of Nuclear Medicine. Dr. Blahd has received the Distinguished Scientist Awards from the Southern-Northern California and Western Regional Chapters of the SNM. For the past 40 years, Dr. Blahd has been chief of the nuclear medicine service at the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center. Throughout all his

(Continued on page 18N)

The Education and Research Foundation Needs Your Help

by *Conrad Nagle, MD*

It was with great foresight that the leaders of the Society of Nuclear Medicine (SNM) 30 years ago gave an initial \$1000 to establish the Education and Research (E&R) Foundation. The idea of utilizing SNM resources to create a separate grant-awarding foundation became a "hot topic" when Merrill H. Bender, MD, was the 15th president of the Society. SNM members saw a need for an organization whose sole function would be to attract physicians into the field of nuclear medicine. The foundation would achieve its mission by offering research grants, fellowships and scholarship funds. Thus, the E&R Foundation was born in January of 1969 under SNM President Craig Harris, MS. The Foundation operates today as a somewhat independent organization supported by SNM.

Why would nuclear medicine need to raise money for education or research?

One only has to look at the decline in government support of medical research grants. The current troubles have only emphasized the great foresight of the physicians, scientists, technologists and volunteers who worked to gather the resources to support the fledgling foundation. The original board of the E&R Foundation included: Asa Seeds, MD, President; Craig Harris, MS, Vice President; James J. Smith, MD, secretary; and Richard Petterson, MD, treasurer.

Building on the accomplishments of past foundation leaders, Abass Alavi, MD, current president of E&R Foundation and professor of radiology, neurology and psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine has set an example for all of us. Dr. Alavi has donated his time and efforts to strengthen the foundation which supports both the education of nuclear medicine practitioners and the research efforts to advance the field of nuclear medicine and improve patient care. Dr. Alavi also has made financial contributions to E&R Foundation, most notably, his recent establishment of a \$15,000 education grant in memory of his father who died when Abass was only 4 years old. Through family members, Dr. Alavi learned that his father had a love for education and learning and had always aspired to be a physician. He decided at a young age that he would fulfill his father's dream and become a physician. For the past 25 years, Dr. Alavi's interest has focused on nuclear medicine. Gerald Mandell, MD, who was Alavi's fellow in 1982, and works at Dupont Institute in Wilmington, DE, was so touched by his colleague's donation that he donated \$10,000 in memory of his own father. Alavi and Mandell combined their funds to

(Continued on page 18N)

Abass Alavi, MD (continued from p. 17N)
accomplishments, his wife, Mitzi, has matched his steadfast belief in the importance of education with her own commitment to the ERF.

Bill and Mitzi have left an everlasting mark on the field of nuclear medicine through their tireless efforts on behalf of the foundation. Both have been great advocates for this worthy cause and have functioned as the most vocal spokespeople for this organization. Together, they have thought of imaginative and creative ways to collect funds for the Foundation. For example, they came up with the idea of publishing a cookbook, which was successfully marketed by the SNM in the 1970's. As close family friends of Benedict Cassen, PhD,—the inventor of the rectilinear scanner—and Mrs. Cassen, Mitzi and Bill were instrumental in making the Cassens aware of the importance of the Foundation for future developments of the specialty.

Following Dr. Cassen's death, through the encouragement of Mitzi and Bill, Dr. Cassen's widow graciously donated a substantial amount of money to the Foundation. This fund supports postdoctoral and student fellowships, a major award for an individual who has made substantial contributions to the field and subscriptions to *The Journal of Nuclear Medicine* for underdeveloped countries. It also funds pilot projects and many other worthy undertakings. Additionally, a family friend of the Blahds, Frank Tick, PhD, a historian, recently established another fund to support education and research activities in the Foundation.

Nuclear medicine practitioners owe so much to both Bill and Mitzi for their unprecedented dedication to the future of the field. They have started a tradition that we should all emulate

if we share their views and are concerned about the survival of our specialty.

Dr. Alavi is the chairman of the Education and Research Foundation and is chief of the division of nuclear medicine and professor of radiology, neurology and psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine in Philadelphia.

Conrad Nagle, MD (continued from p. 17N)

create the Alavi-Mandell Prize. Their funds will encourage future improvements in medical care through the specialty of nuclear medicine.

Plans for the money are to award a \$200 prize to nuclear physician residents and fellows who have published outstanding original papers in *The Journal of Nuclear Medicine* as first authors. They hope to provide 6 to 7 prizes every year. The award will be given during SNM Annual Meetings. By awarding these prizes, Drs. Alavi and Mandell hope to encourage others to join the field of nuclear medicine.

I encourage each member of the Society to become involved in preserving the benefits of nuclear medicine for patients and the growth of our specialty by supporting the E&R Foundation. If you can't make a large financial contribution, make a small one. Every dollar counts towards strengthening education and research efforts. If you can't give financially, donate your time to the Foundation to aid in fund-raising. Giving your time and/or money to the E&R Foundation will not only benefit others but could one day benefit your own practice of medicine.

Dr. Nagle is the editor of Newsline and is the chief of the nuclear medicine department at William Beaumont Hospital in Troy, Michigan.

Certification Exam (Continued from page 13N)

July 1998 must have at least Level 2 training in nuclear cardiology as defined by the guidelines and cannot be "grandfathered in" with equivalent experience. Physicians from foreign countries and those who are boarded in other specialties will be evaluated for eligibility by CCNC on a case-by-case basis.

Nuclear medicine leaders have taken issue with the requirements for the exam, specifically with the minimum level of training required to be eligible to sit for the examination. All ABMS-approved certifications for subspecialties require a minimum of one year of additional training in an ACGME accredited training program—not 4 to 6 months. "The traditional medical education process in the United States requires a basic educational core curriculum developed by the medical field—usually through its scientific bodies such as the Cardiovascular Council of SNM. It also requires an autonomous certification body such as ABNM to assure that the educational requirements are fulfilled and that individuals have an acceptable level of basic knowledge as determined by an examination and participation in an accredited ACGME training program," said ABNM Chairman James J. Conway, MD.

Wackers conceded that a certification process approved by ABMS would be ideal and that one year of training in nuclear cardiology is better than 6 months. He did not, however, feel that one year of training is necessary for clinical competency and thought the requirement would deter cardiologists from taking the exam. "Although I personally support one year of training, it's not realistic because most cardiologists performing nuclear medicine studies don't have the additional year," Wackers said. "We're concerned about people practicing nuclear cardiology with inadequate training. This is more a difference of details than of concepts. We want to measure clinical competence against uniform standards of quality."

The CCNC is currently working in collaboration with a consulting firm to finalize the exam questions. An absolute passing score will be determined by an independent committee of experts. The exam room has the capacity for 450 registrants. As of presstime, 200 physicians have registered for the exam, according to Wackers. The four-hour exam, comprised of 200 multiple choice questions, will take place in Washington, D.C. on September 10, 1996. The registration deadline is July 16. For more information, contact the CCNC office at (301) 320-0399.