

National Atomic Museum Exhibit Celebrates Achievements in Nuclear Medicine



A mannequin is used to demonstrate the Picker 2000XP gamma camera system on display in the new NAM nuclear medicine exhibit. Shown also is Jim Wadell, NAM historian and nuclear medicine project leader.

“Nuclear Medicine: Seeing Is Healing” is the theme of the latest exhibit now on display at the National Atomic Museum (NAM) in Albuquerque, NM. The new exhibit was unveiled in mid-September.

The NAM was established in 1969 and is operated by Sandia National Laboratories for the Department of Energy. It is the only national museum dedicated to nuclear science. A nuclear medicine exhibit had been under consideration by the NAM for some time. By highlighting the various aspects of radioisotopes for medical use, NAM staff hope that the exhibit will educate the public about and

heighten interest in nuclear medicine procedures.

The exhibit consists of seven sections that span early developments and applications of nuclear medicine to current uses and benefits. Highlights include a nuclear pharmacy and a dual-head gamma camera system. The camera system is used in an imaging demonstration that shows visitors the actual images a physician would see when diagnosing a patient.

The NAM is currently developing a traveling version of the exhibit for display at science and health museums across the country. This version is expected to be completed in 1998.

ACNP Proficiency Testing Program Recognized

On July 2, the AMA's American Medical Accreditation Program (AMAP) approved the American College of Nuclear Physicians' (ACNP's) Proficiency Testing and Practice Accreditation Programs.

The AMA began AMAP in 1996 in response to requests for documentation of high-quality medical practice for the public, governmental agencies and third-party payers. The accreditation program assists medical societies in developing quality assurance programs that assess physician

competency in a variety of areas. AMAP also works with organizations to ensure that existing quality assurance programs are compatible with AMAP's guidelines and standards.

By July 1, 1998, physicians seeking AMAP accreditation must complete AMAP-approved self-assessment programs such as that offered by ACNP. The ACNP program, which is 24 years old, enables nuclear medicine physicians to maintain and improve their technical proficiency.

The Society of Nuclear Medicine (SNM) is also developing physician assessment programs. Case modules assessing physician interpretation skills in nuclear cardiology, lung imaging, bone and thyroid studies and scintimammography are in the planning stages. According to Wendy Smith, SNM's director of health care policy, three modules are scheduled for release by late winter, at which time SNM will submit its program to AMAP for approval. Two additional modules are scheduled for release in early 1998.

Demand for Nuclear Medicine Studies Increases

Thirteen million nuclear medicine procedures were performed in the U.S. in 1996, according to data obtained in a survey conducted by Technology Marketing Group (TMG), Des Plaines, IL, in conjunction with the Society of Nuclear Medicine (SNM) and the American Society of Nuclear Cardiology. This growth represents a 7% increase over the 12.1 million procedures performed in 1995. Study data were obtained from more than 4000 U.S. nuclear medicine facilities.

The survey results show that the greatest growth occurred in nuclear cardiology perfusion procedures. In fact, nuclear cardiology studies have increased 40% since 1992.

In 1993, bone and cardiology studies (36% each) constituted the bulk of nuclear medicine studies, with lung (9%), liver/renal/hepatobiliary (11%), brain (1%) and other (including thyroid and tumor localization, 7%) making up the rest. Although the 1996 data show a decrease in bone studies to 27%, the total number of liver/renal/hepatobiliary studies rebounded from 8% in 1994 to 10% in 1996.

Kristin Ludwig, SNM's director of marketing and public relations, believes that the increase in studies may be attributable to the recent availability of new imaging agents and recognition of the value of these studies by primary care physicians. “From June 1996 to June 1997, six new radiophar-

maceuticals were released,” says Ludwig. “The development of these and other agents will be crucial factors as SNM continues to educate referring physicians and managed-care professionals about the benefits of nuclear medicine.”

Are hospitals adequately prepared to respond to the growing demand for nuclear medicine tests? According to TMG, hospitals will purchase about 950 new camera systems this year. TMG managing partner John Vanden Brink believes that the likely outcome will be rapid growth of independent clinics as hospital waiting times lengthen as a result of increased demand for nuclear medicine procedures.