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Electronic Non-Communication

Despite the telephone and the virtues of direct personal interaction, nuclear medicine departments communicate with the outside world via "the report." Even if transmitted by e-mail or fax, the written, typed or word-processed summary of the interaction between the patient and the nuclear medicine department, *the report*, is the principle product in the commerce of nuclear medicine. It is, at least, what we export; it is how we communicate.

From time to time, usually at regional or chapter meetings of the SNM, some particularly literate member of our fraternity makes an appeal, often witty and insightful, for more meaningful reports. Too often, the only people who appreciate the talk, or who are even present, are a few old-timers who still value the written word. Perhaps it is because they grew up in the age when letter writing was still in style; when if you wanted to express yourself, you had to be able to write.

Now, of course, we can simply pick up a telephone. Even if the person we call is unavailable, the universal answering machine permits us to leave a rambling, scrambled and garbled message. I had hoped that the new wave of fax transmission and e-mail would resurrect the art of written communication and accustom us to look again at what it is that we are trying to communicate. My initial experience with e-mail was delight with the speed and convenience. I am concerned, however, that the casual habits developed with voice mail are encouraged by the accessibility of e-mail and further indulged by the feeling that the electronically communicated helvetica (or whatever font of the moment) characters are even less personal than the recorded voice. All sorts of drivel appears.

After quickly responding to an e-mail request, I received a quick e-mail "Thank you." Was this simply the respondent's way of acknowledging receipt? I resisted e-mailing back "You're welcome." What would come next? "Okay?"

Now that we can communicate more conveniently, I hope that we will see renewed efforts to communicate more clearly, less ambiguously and with greater logic than some do now.

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Editor-in-Chief, The Journal of Nuclear Medicine
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