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That's My Ox

The Mid-Winter Meeting of the Society of Nuclear Medicine brings together the active leaders of the specialty to wrestle with issues confronting nuclear medicine as a medical discipline and profession. It also provides an opportunity to socialize with colleagues, to chat poolside or to go to dinner in small groups, without the intense schedule of the Annual Meeting. There is sometimes an opportunity for a long walk or a jog with an old friend or a casual acquaintance and to talk about our experiences in nuclear medicine. We share personal insights, local gossip and institutional frustrations and brag a little about some new study or finding that "we have observed."

And so I found myself on a long walk with a well-published, and somewhat senior, colleague, a clinician and an investigator who led his department for many years until stepping down as director three years ago. He continues to interpret studies, train residents and carry on clinical studies in areas that interest him. Earlier, he had published in many areas of nuclear medicine: GI studies, endocrinology and cardiology. As each new opportunity came along, he tackled it with intelligence, curiosity and confidence. He made new observations, increasing his own sphere of competence and guiding all of us through his publications. Cerebral perfusion SPECT had come along late in his career. "Frankly," he said, "I see no value in it. The differences are small. We don't know what they mean and you can't do anything about it."

I grimaced. My sense of integrity required that I say something. My sense of fraternity urged me to be kind. "I don't agree," I said. "Certainly the book has not been completed on the subject. But I think that the observations being made are real and meaningful. The area still needs work, but you should have more patience. It's not easy, and you need to be involved. Frankly, I think you're showing your age." He shrugged, and we changed the subject.

The next morning I shared a taxi ride to the airport with another long-time friend. He had also done many things in nuclear medicine. Although he had major publications in GI, V/Q imaging and nuclear cardiology, he had really distinguished himself in recent years, ironically, in CNS imaging. He had made many contributions and still had many questions and ideas. As we rambled about the state of nuclear medicine, he offered the observation that the time he had "spent in the area had been worthwhile. Some people waste their time on things like thyroid dosimetry. I don't see anything in that. It has no merit, and it's expensive to do."

I was amazed. Here was a leading nuclear medicine practitioner who daily was advancing the frontiers in his area of involvement, enthusiastic about this new area despite resistance from practitioners with established but naive beliefs and lack of institutional support or reimbursement for his studies.

While he couldn't be expected to know everything, especially about areas of nuclear medicine outside that of his intense preoccupation, where was the awareness that others may have made advances in their areas of interest? Where was the generosity of spirit to recognize the work of others who have labored with intensity and integrity just as he had?

We are frustrated when those outside of nuclear medicine fail to take the time needed to understand the nature of what nuclear medicine has to offer. How disappointing when those within nuclear medicine fail to examine the basis for new practices recommended by individuals or groups involved, or when they fail to invest the time to bring themselves up to speed to do the new procedure right, to do it as well as the committed expert who made the initial observations. How much easier it is to adopt the smug attitude, "I thought about that once; it didn't work then. There can't be anything to it now."

How distressing it is when it's your ox being gored! How different it is when you're goring someone else's ox! Wait a minute; they're all nuclear medicine oxen.

Stanley J. Goldsmith
Editor-in-Chief, *The Journal of Nuclear Medicine*
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