



Society of Nuclear Medicine Offers Physician Evaluation Program

The Society of Nuclear Medicine (SNM) has a long history of providing continuing education through its Annual and Mid-Winter Meetings, peer-reviewed professional journals and continuing education seminars. SNM is increasing its educational offerings with the development of the SNM Physician Evaluation Program (SNM PEP). The goal is a program directed and operated by nuclear medicine physicians to foster continued improvement of the quality of nuclear medicine practice. SNM PEP is based on actual clinical cases that contain patient images and clinical information. Program participants interpret nuclear medicine images contained in the program modules and submit written reports of their findings. SNM PEP differs from other educational programs in that it provides a real practice environment in which participants interpret images and use their practice skills rather than just recall knowledge.

Background

The accreditation of institutional health care providers by the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO), and managed care organizations by the National Committee for Quality Assurance and the JCAHO, has evolved in response to concerns regarding acceptable standards of care. These accrediting bodies have been created in addition to the state licensure process and have largely been granted "deemed status" by all participants in the health care marketplace. Physicians, however, historically have been exempt from accreditation or an equivalent process. This void has begun to be filled by managed care organizations as they build provider panels and develop physician profiles.

This fragmented approach to performance review and profiling by managed care organizations has generated negative reactions from physicians as well as confusion in the marketplace. Differing duplicative credentialing processes, coupled with disparate criteria for both physi-

cian quality and efficiency, have left physicians frustrated and consumers perplexed. Even managed care organizations have acknowledged the excessive cost, complexity and unnecessary duplication of the current processes but feel they have no alternative.

Through the American Medical Accreditation Program, the medical community has taken responsibility for establishing a national standard of quality for physicians. These changes in the health care marketplace, including growing demands for physician accountability, have presented SNM with a unique opportunity to create and implement the first clinical practice self-assessment program for physicians in nuclear medicine. SNM PEP will foster a reduction in variation of image interpretation and reporting. Anonymous participant data will be collected and become a source of information on physician performance.

Program Description

Experts such as SNM councils and other board-certified nuclear medicine physicians are developing SNM PEP case modules in conformance with the SNM Procedure Guidelines, which are approved standards for uniform, quality nuclear medicine procedures. Each case module will be peer reviewed.

Participating physicians will receive a self-assessment module in CD-ROM format. Each module will consist of 10–15 cases with multiple images in each case. After reviewing the images, patient history and other relevant clinical information, the physician will prepare a report giving his or her interpretation of each patient case within the module. Report content should include the following elements:

- Procedure description, including the name of the study, radiopharmaceutical employed, route of administration, timing of scan relative to radiopharmaceutical administration, drugs used for interventional purposes and

any special imaging techniques or custom views to clarify the evaluation.

- A description of findings, including any significant positive findings or pertinent negative findings.
- An impression addressing the clinical question and providing a precise diagnosis when possible and appropriate. The impression should not be a description of the findings, but rather a judgment as to their significance.

SNM PEP will assess the physician's clinical performance by providing self-assessment of study interpretation and by comparing the physician's scores to national averages or benchmarks, as available. Program participants will receive educational feedback on each completed module, including model reports to allow self-comparison to a peer-review-confirmed report conforming to SNM report standards.

The target for completing the first phase of the project is June 1998. The bone imaging module is expected to be available for sale at the SNM Annual Meeting in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Ordering information will appear in the June 1998 issue of *The Journal of Nuclear Medicine*. Future modules planned include thyroid, lung and myocardial perfusion imaging. A fifth module on scintimammography, an innovative procedure using a radiopharmaceutical recently approved by the Food and Drug Administration, is under consideration.

If you have comments or questions on the program or would like additional information, contact Wendy J.M. Smith at (703) 708-9000, ext. 242, or by e-mail at wsmith@snm.org.

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