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The Saga of Nuclear Medicine

(with apologies to Homer and Virgil)

I speak, o muse, of the people,
the men and women of nuclear medicine,
who embarked on a journey many years ago
to bring to mankind, to patients,
a new discipline, a method to quantify
organ function in health and disease;
to develop also a magic bullet
so that they may treat
some of these maladies.

I sing of these people,
these men and women of nuclear medicine,
who grew to adulthood
like their brethren, seemingly normal,
but when exposed to this mystique,
this science, this medical specialty,
forsook their goals and chose instead
to deal with the mysteries of this science,
this discipline that dares
to understand and control
the emissions from the nucleus
so as to provide better diagnoses,
better patient management, therapy
and greater wisdom
in choosing therapeutic options.

Their fate was defined a hundred years ago
when Henri Becquerel first saw
the invisible light,
the mysterious rays,
that like Roentgen's ray
could penetrate matter
and show themselves to film emulsion.
The Curies, a man and a woman,
purified the first of nature's radioactive elements.
Later, the man observed the effects
of the invisible light on his skin.
The light could destroy tissue
and perhaps disease.

The daughter of the Curies
created a method to make versions of elements
that usually did not emit this light do so.
And so, years later, after the big war
east of the Atlantic and west of the Pacific,
people began to use these materials
that emitted this invisible light.

(Continued on page 4A)

Scientists, physicians, technologists
from many disciplines were intrigued,
perhaps infected, by an interest in these substances,
by this light, and the challenge to harness it,
to control it so that
it could be used as medicine,
in medicine, for medicine.

During their struggles,
they have encountered resistance and roadblocks,
at times from governments,
at times from their profession.
But lo, though fifty years have passed,
they labor on, these people,
these men and women of nuclear medicine,
as scientists, physicians, technologists,
to diagnose, to manage, to treat.

Muse, I speak of these people
and I sing their praises
for their commitment, for their effort,
for all that they have done,
for all that they do,
for all that remains to be done.

Stanley J. Goldsmith

Editor-in-Chief, *The Journal of Nuclear Medicine*
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