MDS Nordion’s MAPLE Reactors on Schedule

MDS Nordion reports that two dedicated isotope production reactors, MAPLE 1 and MAPLE 2, are nearing completion at An Atomic Energy of Canada Limited (AECL) reactor site, about two hour’s drive from Nordion’s processing facilities in Kanata, Ontario. The mutual back-up capability provided by the two 10-megawatt reactors will provide a secure supply of the key reactor isotopes for nuclear medicine, meeting the world’s requirements well into the 21st century. Planners intend only one reactor to operate while the other remains in a back-up state of readiness.

The world’s major radiopharmaceutical producers have endorsed construction of MAPLE 1 and 2 as a means to secure supply of molybdenum-99 and other key reactor isotopes. Begun in July 1996, the project’s goal has been to build two reactors and a new processing facility. Overcoming a number of significant regulatory hurdles, the project’s ambitious schedule will see MAPLE 1 irradiating its first targets before the end of 1999. Targets will be processed in the New Processing Facility, with the first samples being available to customers in February 2000. The MAPLE 2 reactor is planned to irradiate its first targets in May 2000.

Each of the reactors will have the capacity to produce more than 100% of the world’s demand for molybdenum-99, xenon-133, iodine-131 and iodine-125. Production can be increased to meet any foreseeable growth. Already this flexibility has been substantiated as the iodine-125 processing design has been altered to increase capacity in light of the significant growth in the demand for that isotope.

More than 15 million diagnostic non-invasive imaging procedures are performed each year worldwide, the majority using MDS Nordion’s medical isotopes. The MAPLE project will help to ensure the future of nuclear medicine and the growth of noninvasive imaging procedures.

More information on MAPLE 1 and 2 is available on MDS Nordion’s internet site: www.mds.nordion.com.

(Reported by François Couillard, Rod Huggins, MDS Nordion)

Medicare Payment Updates on Schedule for 2000

Despite initial concerns that Y2K priorities might delay scheduled Medicare payment updates for doctors, hospitals and other providers in fiscal and calendar year 2000, the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) has said the payments will be made in October and mid-January as long Year 2000-readiness efforts continue on track.

“HCFA’s top priority between now and January 1, 2000, is to make sure Medicare computer systems are Y2K-compliant so that Medicare beneficiaries’ care is uninterrupted and providers’ claims are paid in a timely fashion,” said HCFA administrator Nancy-Ann DeParle.

Earlier, the agency’s expert consultant had expressed concerns that payments might be delayed to minimize computer system disruptions during final Y2K testing and monitoring. But a recent review, HCFA said, showed that “solid progress” has been made on Y2K preparation that “will allow provider payment updates to occur in a timely manner.”

HCFA expects to make Part B payments on January 17, 2000, but will apply the updates retroactively to all claims for services provided on or after January 1. Physicians can file claims as usual, but Medicare will hold all claims with dates of services of January 1, or later, until January 17 to ensure payments are made correctly.

Distinguished Johns Hopkins Hematologist Dies

Patricia A. McIntyre MD, professor emeritus at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine died of cancer March 14, 1999. She was 72.

At Johns Hopkins, McIntyre’s research activities in the Hematology and Nuclear Medicine Divisions of the Department of Medicine included the application of the tracer principle to the study of human pathophysiology. She became nationally and internationally recognized for her knowledge and research in the field of radioactive tracer studies in hematology. At her retirement from Hopkins (1980) she held the position of Associate Professor in the Departments of Medicine, Radiology and Environmental Health.

In recent years, McIntyre devoted herself to aiding those with drug and alcohol addiction problems.

McIntyre received her MD degree from the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, graduating first in her class. After an internship at Massachusetts General Hospital, where she was the first woman house officer on that particular service, she became a research fellow and instructor in hematology in the Department of Medicine at Hopkins.