

Lines from the President-Elect

“May you live in interesting times” can be interpreted as either a blessing or a curse. In nuclear medicine, these “interesting times” are both. Nuclear medicine’s science, technology, and applications are more powerful than ever before, thanks to advances being made in both academic centers and industry (and in collaborations between the two, particularly striking in the area of instrumentation). As a result, nuclear medicine deserves to play an ever more vital role in patient care and biomedical research. However, issues of reimbursement, regulation, radiopharmaceutical approval, radionuclide availability, radiopharmaceutical and instrumentation costs, and lack of adequate market awareness and utilization continue to inappropriately constrain the field’s growth. The pessimists among us believe that these issues are mainly outside of our control; I believe that attitude will become a self-fulfilling prophecy if we let it be.

The Society of Nuclear Medicine, as a major force in nuclear medicine, must continue to aggressively promote the field’s development and utilization. In my “platform” during the 1998 elections, I stated that we in the Society must (1) demonstrate the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of nuclear medicine to referring physicians, regulatory and reimbursement agency officials, hospital and public health administrators, and patients; (2) fight to ensure that the regulatory environment permits us to do our jobs and that reimbursement provides appropriate compensation for our efforts; and (3) support research and facilitate the translation of that research into routine clinical practice. I further argued that we must particularly expand our efforts to generate, collate and present the results of clinical trials. Even from the perspective of a basic scientist rather than a practicing clinician, this is perhaps the single most important thing we can do; nothing could do more to promote both utilization and further expansion of basic research in nuclear medicine than a clear demonstration of nuclear medicine’s value to patients and physicians.

The Society’s new strategic plan articulates the Society’s pri-

orities and its role in these endeavors, with a strong focus on knowledge as our most effective tool. By “knowledge” is meant the gathering, collation and interpretation of information, which these human activities transform into knowledge. In this regard, clinical trials and outcomes research represent a great example of the type of knowledge we need and can effectively wield as a tool. Such a tool can be used to support science and research, education and training, and advocacy activities.

The strategic plan was not created in a vacuum but relies on the other major nuclear medicine-related organizations to do their part, as we in the field seek to minimize overlap and effectively and efficiently marshal and utilize our limited resources. In this regard, we must strive to build synergistic relationships with other societies and with industry ... call it a renewed attitude of inclusiveness and interaction.

In order for nuclear medicine to prosper, we must all work together. Dr. Henry Wagner is fond of saying that, “When you circle the wagons, make sure you’re shooting out, not in.” I would like to add that you must first make sure you’ve formed a circle. In order to truly work together, we must create a culture in which we intrinsically value each other’s unique contributions. In this regard, I must confess to some ambivalence about the implicit policy of “affirmative action for scientists” in having PhDs face off every four years for election to the Society presidency. This practice creates distinctions that are not necessarily helpful in these “interesting times.” All of us in the Society—physicians, scientists, technologists, and industry members—must cut across artificial labels and boundaries to confront the challenges that face us ... for any challenge to any aspect of nuclear medicine is a challenge to us all. I believe that we are rapidly moving in the right direction, and I pledge to do all I can to further the field we all love.

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