

Leadership Update

From the New SNM President

The SNM has turned 50 years old. During this half century, it has created an illustrious history, witnessed phenomenal growth in usefulness in patient care, established numerous milestones, and become one of the world's leading health care organizations. These strong achievements have been made by the Society's gifted and visionary members, who have, based on the tracer principle, developed ingenious techniques so that the discipline of nuclear medicine is now positioned to serve its patients better than ever before. Designed to follow physiology, molecular biology, and biochemistry of diseases, these techniques are noninvasive, applicable both to diagnose and treat diseases, and are readily amenable to quantifying results. At the same time, however, the entire medical field is undergoing a profound transformation that has created challenges for our specialty, despite its deep roots, uniqueness, and strengths.

Scientific organizations at the most fundamental level are about solving problems. We must address our own problems one at a time. It is a great honor to serve as president of the SNM, but I am keenly aware that the office of the presidency of this great organization is bigger than any one individual. As I take on this responsibility, do I feel lonely at the top? No. I feel confident that together we will steer this ship in the right direction, whether through storm or calm.

To prevail in storms, whether predicted or unforeseen, we must continue to remain strong and build upon our strengths. During recent years, I have seen remarkably improved communication among and more frequent dissemination of information to our membership, a change that has been widely appreciated. Our enhanced communication with professional organizations with common goals has formed a solid foundation for trust and cooperation. Open and frequent communication is essential for effective governing in any leading organization.

Our restructured governance has paved the way for better handling of emerging issues and has also provided the ability to foster strategic planning that will shape the future of our organization. Our PET Center for Learning and the recently established PET Center of Excellence, led by SNM President-Elect Peter Conti, MD, are contributing to the advancement of molecular imaging, consistent with the recently revised Society mission and logo. Our councils, committees, and chapters are better focused than before and are making excellent contributions to many of the SNM activities and goals. We will continue to nurture these strengths and build upon them.

What distinguishes us from all other imaging or therapeutic modalities is the minimally invasive tracer

technique, which permits us to determine and monitor physiologic, pharmacologic, and biochemical modulations at the cellular level that form the basis of disease. As the entire imaging world is embracing molecular imaging, we must remember (and not allow others to forget) that the roots of this effort are the deepest in nuclear medicine. Based on these capabilities, we can not only diagnose diseases but also treat them and determine the effectiveness of a wide range of therapeutic interventions—from chemotherapy to radiation therapy to surgery—all with minimal intervention. These abilities combined are unparalleled in any other field. Building upon this strong foundation ought to make us stronger. It is with this concept in mind that I have formed a task force that includes molecular imaging experts from all disciplines who, during the next few months, will make recommendations as to how SNM can build a platform that will promote research, education, and applications in molecular imaging for nuclear medicine physicians and scientists, while still working in close harmony and synergy with other imaging organizations and modalities.

Science enhances the art of medicine. To stimulate the growth of molecular imaging and capitalize on all of its potential, we need not only novel radiopharmaceuticals but also the development and introduction of radionuclides that promise to provide radiopharmaceuticals with innovative applications. With the consultation and support of my predecessors, Drs. Gelfand and Royal, we have revived the national radionuclide availability issue through a task force chaired by Dr. Michael Welch. We will prepare a platform to work with other organizations, seeking their support and cooperation. Our goal is to seek help from a range of resources, including industry, appropriately equipped academic institutions, and government agencies. I realize that this goal is neither new nor easy to accomplish, nor can the solutions be obtained quickly. I believe, however, that this is an important issue for us. As national security regulations tighten restrictions on international transfers of even beneficial radioactive materials, the need is more compelling than ever to pay attention to this topic, even though some of our industrial partners have done so well in producing and supplying medically useful radionuclide across the borders.

As we continue to encourage research in molecular imaging for development of new radiopharmaceuticals



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for future use and work to modify the processes that will accelerate their approvals, we must embrace newly approved radiopharmaceuticals, whether for diagnosis or therapy. It is only through their widespread use that we can contribute to improved health care and patient management and encourage our investigators in academia and our industrial partners to work harder and do better.

Our practice depends upon patient referrals. Many physicians in primary care, clinical oncology, neurology, and cardiology, for example, may be unaware of the full range of benefits that nuclear medicine can offer their patients; other physicians simply rely on the modalities they have been using and may be unwilling to try new ones. To make our referring community aware of nuclear medicine's advances, I intend to approach our giants, the SNM past presidents, to form a think tank to reach out to referring physicians in a mass appeal.

Patient outreach is equally important, especially efforts to alleviate the phobias surrounding the words "nuclear" and "radioactivity." The past presidents' think tank will seek ways to reach the general population through the news media, talk shows, or popular magazine articles. These approaches will be complementary to our ongoing efforts aimed at such goals. This think tank subcommittee will provide guidance in current public relations undertakings and serve as an advisory committee in strategic planning for the future of our organization.

We are leaders in the field. The rest of the nuclear medicine world, particularly those in developing countries, looks to us for educational material and technology that can be put to good use in their medical centers. We need to partner with them and create resources to provide helpful material in such a way that it will not only support our leadership position but also enhance friendship and encourage SNM membership. As one example of such an effort, through the generosity of Dr. Abass Alavi and the consent of our Education and Research Foundation (ERF), we will begin to dispatch a number of current hardcopies of *The Journal of Nuclear Medicine* every month to 9 developing countries. This is in addition to an ongoing program to distribute 12 copies of the journal to leading medical institutions in India each month. None of

these donated journals goes to an individual. It is my dream to be able to add to this effort by providing young scholars from developing countries with fellowships for training in the leading nuclear medicine centers in our country.

We must not, of course, forget our own young scholars. Our ERF efforts provide several awards and fellowships each year to deserving young scholars, but we rarely hear about their innovative research. Through the SNM/ERF coalition, we will attempt to enhance the visibility and prestige of both these fellowships and those who receive them, so that every young scholar will be aware of and encouraged to compete for these fellowships.

We must also raise our funding base, actively seeking financial support, just as do many other professional organizations. One of the tasks of our think tank committee will be to help us raise funds.

We must continue to partner with other professional organizations and work closely with them. Such partnerships provide a platform for dialogue, an exchange of knowledge and technology, and a means to address common problems. It is my goal to hold a summit of all leaders of our nuclear medicine-related organizations (national and international) and invite those who were once active in our Society but hold leading positions elsewhere today.

How will I accomplish this during the next 12 months? It is unclear. I do know, however, that at SNM we have a galaxy of stars, and I have been lucky to know many of them. I trust that the best decisions are evidence based and are made collectively and not individually. No individual can solve all problems, but collectively we can solve some of them.

Implementing these ideas will call for strong administrative support. The Society's administration, including outstanding individuals and led by our dedicated, experienced, and conscientious Executive Director Virginia Pappas, is a great and reliable asset. I am confident that together we will steer the ship in the right direction, whether through storm or calm.

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