

# DOE Medical Research Funding Cut in FY 2006 Budget; SNM Calls for Nuclear Medicine Community Action

The nuclear medicine community was stunned on February 7 to learn of deep cuts slated for the Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Science as detailed in President George W. Bush's \$2.57 trillion fiscal year (FY) 2006 federal budget. The budget proposes reducing funding for the Office of Science's Office of Biological and Environmental Research (BER) medical applications programs from approximately \$37 million in FY 2005 to \$13.6 million in FY 2006. The results of such cuts would be immediate cutbacks and, in several cases, termination of programs essential to fundamental innovations in nuclear medicine.

SNM leadership reacted quickly to the news. On February 9, SNM President Mathew L. Thakur, PhD, visited with his colleagues and key Congressional leaders on the Hill and addressed an urgent message on February 11 to SNM leaders, members, and to all those in health care who understand the expanding and crucial role of nuclear medicine in diagnosis and treatment. "The SNM strongly opposes these proposed budget cuts and is coordinating an immediate response urging Congress to reinstate nuclear medicine funding to the DOE," said Thakur, who outlined strategies and action items to be undertaken to counter the proposed cuts. Among these were:

- Mobilization of the general membership through an Action Alert placed on the SNM Web site on February 12, explaining the issues and providing members with a template letter to send to legislators.
- Mobilization of SNM State Health Policy Liaisons, who were asked to complete additional specialized tasks at district office levels.
- Alerting specific Congressional committees and subcommittees by sending letters to key members informing them of the Society's position and how the proposed cuts will adversely affect patient care.
- Preparation for appropriations hearings, including submission of written testimony from the nuclear medicine community for the Congressional record and supplying key questions to members of Congress for administration officials during budget hearings.
- Initiation of outreach efforts with industry representatives, other specialty associations, and patient advocacy

groups to solicit involvement in the Society's efforts to counter the proposed cuts.

- Investigation of the feasibility of targeted advertising to Congress and Congressional staff.
- Continued work with administration groups, such as the Office of the Science Adviser and the Office of Management and Budget, to more adequately address the needs of nuclear medicine in planning for the 2007 FY budget.

## A History of Accomplishment

For more than 50 years, BER has invested in the advancement of research to develop key applications of nuclear technologies for medical diagnosis and treatment. Nearly every nuclear medicine scan or test used today was made possible by

past BER-funded research on radiotracers, radiation detection devices, gamma cameras, PET and SPECT scanners, and computer science. The proposed cuts threaten BER Medical Sciences funding of cutting-edge nuclear medicine research at DOE national laboratories as well as at universities and private institutions across the United States.

The current projects of the medical science programs in the BER are an outgrowth of the original charge of the Atomic Energy Commission (the forerunner of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission), "to exploit nuclear energy to pro-

mote human health." From the production of a few medically important radioisotopes in 1947, to the development of production methods for radiopharmaceuticals used in standard diagnostic tests for millions of patients throughout the world, to the development of ultrasensitive diagnostic instruments (including PET), the DOE medical sciences program has been both a participant and an engine of change in the development of nuclear medicine.

Today the program, through radiopharmaceutical and molecular nuclear medicine research, works to develop new applications of radiotracers and in vivo radionuclide detection in diagnosis and treatment by integrating the latest concepts and developments in chemistry, pharmacology, genomic sciences, transgenic animal models, instrumentation, and structural, computational and molecular biology. The program supports directed nuclear medicine research

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A substantial effort has gone into expanding the focus and content of posters presented at the meeting. A new Educational Exhibits poster category will include displays that summarize and review clinical or research topics. To increase the involvement of young professionals in SNM activities, the meeting planners this year will sponsor a new Young Professionals Poster session. Eligible applicants for this session include medical students, residents, fellows, graduate students, or young physicians or scientists less than 3 years out of training. The SNM, in association with the SNM Young Professionals Committee of the Academic Council, will recognize the best research-based or clinically oriented posters submitted to the Young Professionals Track.

In a new feature designed to enhance the learning experience of attendees and emphasize the international nature of the meeting, 2 posters will be presented from the Asian Regional Cooperative Council for Nuclear Medicine: "Molecular Imaging Using Sodium/Iodide Symporter Gene" and "Clinical Hypoxia Imaging Using SPECT in Patients with Cerebral, Myocardial, or Tumoral Hypoxia."

Attendees will also be able to test their interpretation skills by reading case-of-the-day posters from the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center. Cases will change daily, and correct diagnoses will qualify submitters for entry in a lottery for complimentary registration at next year's SNM meeting in San Diego, CA. Answers to the previous days' questions will be available at snmCentre, the hub of Society activities in the convention center.

#### Additional Educational Offerings

Three special 2-day sessions will precede the formal opening of the meeting. One, designed for scientists and to be offered on June 17 and 18, will present "Transla-

tional Applications of Molecular Imaging and Radionuclide Therapy." Topics to be covered will include "In Vivo Tagging and Imaging Assays," "Technical Aspects of Small Animal Imaging," "In Vivo Imaging," and "Bench to Bedside Translational Studies: The Role of a Diagnostic Scan in Therapy Selection." The second 2-day session, to be offered on June 18 and 19, is a Nuclear Medicine Board Examination review course for residents seeking certification and physicians preparing for maintenance of certification. A similar 2-day course for technologists preparing for the Nuclear Medicine Technology Certification Board Examination will also be offered on June 18 and 19 and will include a mock examination.

A 3-day course, "CT Workshop: Radiology-Based Training for the Nuclear Medicine Technologist", will be offered June 18-20, and is designed to prepare nuclear medicine technologists for the CT Certification Examination. Lectures and presentations will focus on cross-sectional anatomy, radiation exposure, instrumentation, 3D and 4D imaging protocols, and SPECT and PET/CT applications.

Get organized with the SNM Online Meeting Planner, scheduled to launch in April 2005. This user-friendly tool is a virtual personal assistant that allows attendees to log on and find the information they need to make the most of their time at the annual meeting. Attendees will find everything from session schedules and course topics to faculty bios, CE credit information, and more. After launch, the Online Meeting planner will be available at [www.snm.org/meetingplanner](http://www.snm.org/meetingplanner).

Watch the SNM 2005 Annual Meeting Web site ([www.snm.org/am](http://www.snm.org/am)) for more information or see the preliminary program mailed with this issue of *JNM*. ✨

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through radiopharmaceutical development and molecular nuclear medicine activities to study uses of radioisotopes for noninvasive diagnosis and targeted, internal molecular radiotherapy. The current programs also encourage the development of a new generation of radiolabeled molecules and technologies for molecular delivery of radioisotopes.

#### The Effects of Deep Budget Cuts

Most, if not all, of these efforts would be seriously undermined by the proposed cuts, which would be exacerbated by other proposed funding reductions to the DOE national laboratory infrastructure. Under the 2006 budget request, the total DOE budget would drop by 2%, from \$23.9 billion in FY 2005 to \$23.4 billion, and the total Office of Science budget would be reduced by 3.8%, from \$3,599.6

million to \$3,462.7 million. Overall, BER programs would be cut by more than 21%. Thakur noted that the almost two-thirds reduction in the portion of the BER budget designated for medical applications does not even adequately reflect the severity of cuts to nuclear medicine. "Much of the remaining \$13.6 million is actually slated to go to non-nuclear medicine purposes," he said. "The loss to nuclear medicine through these proposed cuts would be truly devastating to researchers in our field, many of whom will be forced to leave ongoing projects uncompleted and curtail plans for investigations that promised significant insights and potential patient benefit."

*Details on the 2006 FY proposed budget for the DOE Office of Science are available in a budget highlights document at: [www.mbe.doe.gov/budget/06budget/Content/Highlights/06\\_highlights.pdf](http://www.mbe.doe.gov/budget/06budget/Content/Highlights/06_highlights.pdf) under Section 3, Science (p. 72).*