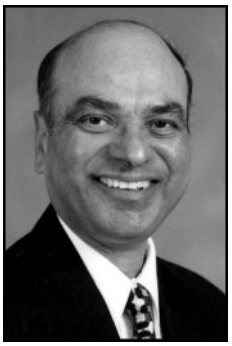
SNM: Today and Tomorrow

My term as SNM president will end at the conclusion of the 52nd Annual Meeting of the SNM in Toronto this month, and this is my last Newsline communication. I want you to know that SNM remains strong and continues to get stronger. Our membership is growing slowly but surely, and the number of our clinical procedures continues to increase annually, reaching almost 20 million in 2004. During the past few months, SNM has become increasingly proactive and initiated a number of new programs that promise to place the society in an influential, strategic position for the future.

At the same time, SNM faces new challenges that were neither expected nor foreseen, and we are addressing them with determination and persistence. On February 7, President Bush proposed that DOE's 2006 budget for basic nuclear imaging research in the Medical Applications and Measurement Science Program be reduced from $37 million to $13.6 million and that such funding be eliminated in 2007—even though for the past 50 years DOE has exclusively supported this basic research and the outstanding accomplishments that have resulted have placed our nation in its world leadership position in nuclear medicine. This severe blow, which is the result of lack of knowledge of the noteworthy accomplishments of the DOE program and of the ideological dogma that such biomedical research is not a core mission of DOE, shook us all. However, SNM and its members faced the situation with courage and determination. We wrote more than 3,100 letters and e-mails to our lawmakers, chairs of appropriation committees, and committee members. We visited dozens of senators and representatives, testified to advisory committees, explained the DOE program's accomplishments to the members of the U.S. Office of Science and Technology Policy and the Office of Management and Budget, explained the clinical applications of nuclear medicine at a Senate caucus, and brought our cause to the attention of the Secretaries of the Department of Health and Human Sciences (HHS) and DOE. In a recent action, 61 senators wrote to Senator Pete V. Domenici (R-NM), chair of the Appropriation Committee, and Sen. Harry Reid (D-NV), ranking member of the committee, urging the reinstatement of DOE funding to the 2005 level. Furthermore, by the time you read this column, we will have met with NIH Director Elias A. Zerhouni, MD, in a meeting initiated by HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt. We will continue to fight for basic research in molecular imaging/nuclear medicine for 2006 and beyond.



Mathew L. Thakur, PhD
President, SNM

Molecular imaging promises to contribute extensively toward improving the quality of life for our patients. The role of radioactive tracers and nuclear medicine in molecular imaging remains undisputable. However, we realize the rising potential of other imaging modalities, and SNM continues to remain inclusive. SNM has formed a Molecular Imaging Center of Excellence and is currently recruiting members. In addition, SNM held a historic summit that was co-organized with the Radiological Society of North America (RSNA). At the April 21–22 summit, key leaders in molecular and functional imaging, nuclear medicine, radiology, and engineering discussed raising the awareness of the future of molecular imaging within the imaging community and developing tools to prepare current generations of graduates for this future. In addition, the participating societies explored future collaborative actions. They will summarize their findings and action plans in a future collaborative position statement or white paper. Participating in the summit were officers from SNM and RSNA as well as the Academy of Molecular Imaging, the American Association of Physicists in Medicine, the American Board of Nuclear Medicine, the American Board of Radiology, the American Roentgen Ray Society, the American Society of Cardiology, the International Society for Magnetic Resonance in Medicine, the Society for Molecular Imaging, and the Society of Radiopharmaceutical Sciences.

The National Radionuclide Production Enhancement (NRPE) program remains important for continued function and future innovation in nuclear medicine and molecular imaging. The 5 NRPE goals, which include funding of $76–$86 million over 10 years, are supported by 13 other biomedical organizations and have caught the attention of several key senators. Continued efforts on the part of SNM will determine the program's long-term success.

SNM's commitment in the international arena remains strong. The society's task force is seeking means to enhance interactions with organizations such as the World Federation of Nuclear Medicine and Biology, the European Association of Nuclear Medicine, and the Interna-

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tional Atomic Energy Agency and to promote educational activities in developing countries.

Our PET Center of Excellence and Molecular Imaging and Radionuclide Therapy Trials (MIRT^2) continue to do well and are accelerating their activities, placing SNM in a strategic position to enhance its role in promoting education to help with the accelerated approval of novel radiopharmaceuticals.

Our communication with the Food and Drug Administration and its understanding of our needs is better today than it has ever been. We must continue to work with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to increase communication and better understanding of our role in the diagnosis and treatment of diseases. Our Lifelong Learning Self-Assessment Program for maintenance of certification is unique. When fully completed and implemented, it will add to SNM's strength in education and serve our physician members in critical times.

Although I am pleased and proud of SNM's achievements and long-term strategic goals, we must not forget that we live and work in a rapidly changing world in which we face unprecedented competition. Although SNM expects competition, to remain both up to date and competitive, we must continue to be focused and prepared for unthinkables both in opportunities and threats. We must be proactive and seek ways to grow, because growth is a sign of success, helps attract more members, adds to the strength of our voices, and leads to greater success.

SNM is a voluntary organization, and it is blessed with many bright stars—physicians, scientists, and technologists. However, I believe that more champions, who are willing to invest time and energy to participate in many SNM activities, are needed. As president, I learned that governing SNM is similar to conducting a symphony. The beautiful music comes from the orchestra, not the conductor. I want to thank all those who participate in this great orchestra and continue to make selfless sacrifices of their time and efforts to make extensive contributions to the welfare of SNM.

I want especially to thank 3 women, without whose support this presidency wouldn't have been so rewarding: my wife Lalita, who never complained of my countless days away from home, or when I completely ignored my household responsibilities; my chairperson, Dr. Vijay Rao, who never questioned my unprecedented absence from work and who encouraged me to work harder and do better; and Virginia Pappas, our executive director, for her total dedication to the leadership and to SNM. SNM leadership changes, new ideas evolve, and new problems arise. Virginia and her excellent staff provide the bridge and care, without which this organization would not have been as visible, vigilant, and victorious.

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ical Advisory Committee of the New York City Department of Health from 1960 through 1978. He was a founder of the AAPM and received the William D. Coolidge Award, its most prestigious prize, in 1974. He also received the Distinguished Scientific Achievement Award of the Health Physics Society in 1982, the Aebersold Award of the SNM in 1984, the gold medal of the American College of Radiology in 1988, and the gold medal of the American Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology in 1993.

John Laughlin will be sadly missed but always remembered as a man whose contributions to our field are almost without precedent and who, on the occasion of the 2004 Laughlin Lecture at our institution, exhibited the same interest and enthusiasm for the use of cyclotron isotopes at Memorial as he had done during his entire life.

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