SNM Debuts Online Lifelong Learning and Self-Assessment Program

The SNM has debuted an online system through which imaging physicians and technologists can register for oncology PET and PET/CT continuing education modules to satisfy new maintenance of certification (MOC) requirements. Using the SNM Lifelong Learning and Self-Assessment Program (LLSAP), which launched on November 28, nuclear medicine/molecular imaging professionals will be able to satisfy 1 of the 4 components of MOC now required by the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS).

"Informed consumers want assurances that health care providers deliver quality care that is based on the most recent medical knowledge, technology, and skill," said SNM President Peter S. Conti, MD, PhD, a professor of radiology, clinical pharmacy, and biomedical engineering at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles. "SNM's peer-reviewed LLSAP allows nuclear medicine/molecular imaging health care practitioners to assess their medical knowledge and competency in patient care, in systems-based practice, and in practice-based learning and improvement. This online program is the premier resource for nuclear medicine educational materials."

Over the next 14 months, the SNM LLSAP will offer numerous Web-based self-assessment modules. Topics addressed will include technical aspects as well as evaluation and treatment of patients using CT, PET, PET/CT, SPECT, SPECT/CT, and therapy with unsealed radioactive sources. "The SNM self-assessment program provides continuing education credit for physicians, technologists, pharmacists, and scientists," said Dominique Delbeke, MD, PhD, chair of the SNM Committee on MOC and a professor of radiology and radiological sciences at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine (Nashville, TN). American Medical Association PRA Category 1 credit is offered as well as SNM VOICE credit for nuclear medicine technologists. These self-assessment modules will be approved by the American Board of Nuclear Medicine (ABNM) to satisfy the MOC requirements for nuclear medicine physician diplomates. An application was also submitted to the American Board of Radiology to obtain self-assessment module (SAM) credit.

How Does Maintenance of Certification Affect Nuclear Medicine?

Five years ago the ABMS voted unanimously to expand and replace recertification programs with MOC programs—more comprehensive efforts to assess the ongoing competence of physician specialists and their ability to provide quality health care in 6 general competencies: medical knowledge, patient care, interpersonal and communication skills, professionalism, practice-based learning and improvements, and systems-based practice. In the past, the certification process included successful completion of an approved educational program, an unrestricted medical license as evidence of professional standing, and passing the certification examination. Nuclear medicine professionals can no longer simply take an exam to renew a certificate; lifelong learning must be documented.

The ABNM MOC program is a process designed to document nuclear medicine physicians' maintenance of the necessary competencies to provide quality patient care. This is now an ongoing process and will require the assessment and improvement of practice performance by nuclear medicine physicians, as well as other physician specialists who wish to be certified and/or maintain certification in nuclear medicine.

To renew certification, a nuclear medicine physician will be required to present evidence of:

- Professional standing: medical license(s) with no limitations on the practice of medicine and surgery in that jurisdiction.
- Lifelong learning and self-assessment: commitment to lifelong learning and involvement in a periodic self-assessment process to guide continuing learning. The ABNM requires 20 nuclear medicine–specific continuing medical education credits per year.
- Cognitive expertise: cognitive expertise based on exam performance. That exam should be secure, reliable, and valid. It must contain questions on fundamental knowledge, up-to-date practice-related knowledge, and other issues, such as ethics and professionalism. This component consists of the recertification examination administered by the ABNM.
- Performance in practice evaluation: evidence of evaluation of performance in practice, including the medical care provided for common/major health conditions, and physician behaviors, such as communication and professionalism, as they relate to patient care. ABMS is developing practice evaluation tools, and SNM plans to develop management modules in the future.

The ABNM is requiring MOC participation for its diplomates with time-limited certificates beginning in 2007. The ABNM is also strongly encouraging all of its diplomates to begin participation in MOC programs as they are developed.

SNM LLSAP Modules

The first SNM online self-assessment module—Oncology PET and PET/CT—is now available and offers

the first 2 of 9 self-assessment sections, covering hematologic and gastrointestinal malignancies. Each self-assessment module offers a syllabus focusing on the latest information and developments in the field from the past 3 years, multiple-choice questions with critiques explaining the correct answer and why optional responses are incorrect, and interactive case studies, with a functional display program, including a detailed patient history and a DICOM image dataset. Each program participant moves through these online modules at his or her own pace.

The SNM self-assessment modules have been developed by prominent nuclear/molecular imaging specialists, noted Delbeke. Module vice-chairs include SNM Vice President-Elect Alexander (Sandy) McEwan, MD (Edmonton, Alberta); Elias Botvinick, MD (San Francisco, CA); Marcelo Di Carli, MD (Boston, MA); Simin Dadparvar, MD (Gladwyne, PA); Kirk Frey, MD, PhD (Ann Arbor, MI); Michael J. Gelfand, MD (Cincinnati, OH); Lale Kostakoglu, MD (New York, NY); Alan H. Maurer, MD (Philadelphia, PA); Christopher J. Palestro, MD (New Hyde Park, NY); Ronald Van Heertum, MD (New York, NY); Ronald Walker, MD (Little Rock, AR); Marguerite Parisi, MD (Seattle, WA); Jeffrey Clanton, MS, (Nashville, TN); and George Zubal, PhD (New Haven, CT).

Other PET and PET/CT oncologic sections to come include Artifacts and Pitfalls of PET Imaging, Solitary Pulmonary Nodules and Lung Cancer, Melanoma–Sarcoma–Neuroendocrine Malignancies, Central Nervous System Malignancies, Head and Neck Tumors, Male Genitourinary Malignancies, Radiation Therapy Planning, and Breast and Gynecologic Cancers. In addition, the SNM LLSAP will soon offer self-assessment modules in Cardiovascular SPECT and PET, with sections on New Developments in SPECT Myocardial Perfusion Imaging, PET Myocardial Imaging, Cardiovascular CT, and Hybrid PET/CT; Neurology SPECT and PET, with sections on Overview and Dementia, Head Trauma and Movement Disorders, Cerebrovascular Disease, Epilepsy, and Brain Tumors; and Endocrinology, with sections on Benign Thyroid Disease, Parathyroid Disorders, Adrenal Disorders, and Neuroendocrine Disorders. Additional self-assessment modules are under development addressing non-PET diagnostic oncology and oncology therapy, pulmonology, gastroenterology, musculoskeletal and genitourinary disorders, and basic sciences.

To register or learn more about the SNM LLSAP, see www.snm.org/llsap.

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Because ^{18}F-FDG is already approved for use, these techniques can be transitioned to clinical trials with relative ease. Other Jonsson Cancer Center researchers conducting a clinical trial of a melanoma vaccine will be collaborating with Witte and his team to monitor immune response in study volunteers. The results of imaging and quantitative assessment with the new technique will provide valuable information on management of patients in the study, including vital data affecting decisions about how or whether to proceed to selected therapies.

In reviewing their results, the authors stated that "Many of the problems in evaluating immunotherapy protocols stem from the lack of effective tools to follow the extent and duration of response to treatment. In this study, we have demonstrated a strategy to monitor a specific primary immune response against a tumor challenge."

Full text of the article has been made available from the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences at:* www.pnas.org/cgi/content/full/102/48/17412.