

Survey Profiles U.S. Nuclear Medicine Technologist Practice

According to *Nuclear Medicine Technologists in the United States: Findings from a 2005 Survey*, the future looks bright for nuclear medicine technologists. The survey, conducted by the SNMITS and summarized in a November 14 press release, indicated that technologists enjoy their jobs, find their salaries to be near the top of the scale for professions with similar educational requirements, are well educated, and remain poised for continuing growth and change. "The study, the most comprehensive picture of nuclear medicine technologists ever developed, contains information about demographic characteristics, education, employment, career paths, and attitudes about the profession," said SNMITS President D. Scott Holbrook, CNMT, PET. "By conducting this survey, SNMITS can learn more about the thoughts, opinions, and challenges of technologists so its leaders can make more informed decisions and better meet current and future needs. With this information, we will be able to take the lead in determining how the nuclear medicine technologists of today may broaden their scope to become the imaging specialists or molecular imaging technologists of the future."

"More than 2,200 nuclear medicine technologists (certified either by the Nuclear Medicine Technology Certification Board and/or the American Registry of Radiologic Technologists) responded to a 60-question survey concerning multiple aspects of the profession," said Anthony Knight, MBA, CNMT, NCT, who chaired the SNMITS Advisory Committee for the survey. When asked to speculate on their future, 6 of 10 technologists responded that they expected to remain in their current positions for the next 5 years, but a majority (53.3%) indicated that additional training would be necessary to continue their work. Technologists identified a need for additional training in CT (19.5%), PET/CT (37.7%), SPECT/CT (13.1%), MR imaging (3.0%), and mammography/PET (1.2%).

Additional findings in key areas included:

- **Salaries:** The average total salary of full-time technologists (including wages for on-call time) is \$70,470. Nuclear medicine technologists working with fusion imaging (such as PET/CT) earn higher salaries than those in general nuclear medicine. Average total U.S. salaries are highest in the west (\$82,890) and mid-Atlantic regions (\$71,260). The lowest average salaries are found in the mountain (\$60,690) and midwest (\$63,210) states.
- **Job satisfaction:** A majority (53.7%) of respondents are very satisfied with their jobs, and nearly 19 out of 20 respondents (93.5%) are "very or somewhat" satisfied.
- **Geographic location:** The number of certified technologists per state population varies greatly, with high ratios in states such as Nebraska, South Dakota, and West Virginia and the smallest concentrations in Oklahoma and Nevada.
- **Demographics:** The majority of certified technologists work in hospitals or medical centers (54.8%), whereas 15.9% work in cardiology specialty centers. The average age of respondents was 44, almost 4 years older than the average age of the U.S. workforce in 2004, and nearly two-thirds were older than 40. Nearly 65% are women.
- **Education:** More than 90% of nuclear medicine technologists indicated they had completed some college education, and nearly a third expect to pursue additional academic education (an acknowledgement of the rapid evolution of nuclear medicine and molecular imaging).
- **Certification and licensure:** About two-thirds of respondents work in states that require licensing.

In addition, the survey indicated that nuclear medicine technologists are keenly aware of the speed with which the profession is changing and that new imaging technologies are resulting in evolving responsibilities. The report pointed to coming trends, including the evolution of medical imaging, the increasing importance of fusion imaging technologies, and the shift of nuclear medicine practice toward cardiologists, oncologists, and other specialists. The study also provided a series of recommendations, including:

- Technologists should pursue licensure in all states to serve the needs and protect the safety of the public;
- The nuclear medicine community should promote a standardized, legislated legal scope of practice for technologists;
- The general knowledge base and skill sets should be augmented to include fusion imaging and the latest technologies;
- The work of scientists and industry on new imaging technologies should be tracked closely so that educational programs can be adjusted as needed; and
- The nuclear medicine community should work to increase the number of certified technologists in all states.

The Center for Health Workforce Studies at the University of Albany conducted the survey and prepared the 158-page survey results. Complete survey results are available on the SNM Web site at www.snm.org (click on the Research and Data link). The report's executive summary was published in the December issue of the *Journal of Nuclear Medicine Technology*. ✽