



Advocacy Now and for the Future

During our Annual Meeting, SNM sent more than 150 members to Capitol Hill to talk to their representatives about issues affecting molecular imaging and nuclear medicine. The topics listed below were points of discussion for that activity; I call them our 3 “Rs”: reimbursement, regulations, and research.

Reimbursement: The enactment of the Deficit Reduction Act impedes the delivery of quality health care. The consequences (intended or not) of this piece of legislation are significant for the patients that we care for, resulting in limited access and increased wait times—all due to reimbursement cuts in imaging. It is critical that all members actively engage their representatives and tell them about how this law affects our ability to care for patients.

Reimbursement success is due not only to SNM members but also to the patients we treat. Our success in getting FDG studies reimbursed—and the reimbursement expanded to other conditions—was driven in large part by patient advocacy. We need to repeat that success with other imaging agents and protocols. To accomplish such, SNM has developed—through the Molecular Imaging Center of Excellence—a plan for outreach to patient advocacy groups to educate them about the value of imaging and to campaign for expanding its use in diagnosis, staging, and outcome determination.

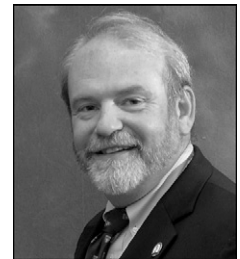
Regulations: SNM is working on issues surrounding the regulatory environment from a number of angles. We continue to work with SNMTS to get the CARE bill passed, which would establish education and certification standards for technologists, sonographers, therapists, and physicists across the country. Senate passage is virtually assured; we continue to work on that issue with the House. We recently met with Andrew von Eschenbach, MD, commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), to discuss 3 issues of importance to our community. First, with the retirement of George Mills, MD, former director of the division of medical imaging and hematology products, there is no one in the reviewing division who has experience in the field of medical imaging. We stressed to von Eschenbach and his staff that such experience is critical to ensure that knowledgeable reviews are conducted on radiopharmaceuticals. Second, we stressed the need to re-establish the Medical Imaging Drug Advisory Committee to provide external expertise on this topic. A review of the FDA advisory committees is underway and our request will be included in that review. Finally, we began a discussion with FDA on the importance of the utilization of metabolic and physiologic tracers for assessing outcomes in clinical trials.

Dale Klein, PhD, chair of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), spoke at our Annual Meeting. SNM leaders toured the exhibit hall with Klein and Gregory Jaczko, PhD, NRC commissioner, on separate visits to give them a sense of the breadth of activity in molecular imaging/nuclear medicine and to introduce them to the added tasks that NRC will cover when naturally occurring and accelerator-produced radioactive materials are integrated into its mission.

Research: The loss of funding for nuclear medicine research in the U. S. Department of Energy budget has been a tremendous blow to our field. While the impact won't be felt for years, the effect will be seen in a drop-off of new agents introduced, a loss of funds to support the training of students and postdoctoral fellows to fill the expanding role of nuclear medicine in patient care, and a gap in the development of instrumentation that will improve our imaging capabilities. Thanks to our Capitol Hill activity, 15 senators signed onto a letter requesting that Senate appropriators restore funding for nuclear medicine research. That letter, part of a larger SNM campaign, helped achieve the inclusion of \$20 million specifically for nuclear medicine-related research in the Senate committee report. Our task is now to get House energy appropriators to agree with the Senate on that issue when they meet in conference.

SNM is working with the National Cancer Institute imaging program to establish guidelines and evidence that the molecular imaging/nuclear medicine community is generating valid studies to support using SPECT, PET, and hybrid imaging technology for a variety of diseases. This will not only promote the adoption of the technology for patient care but will also create stronger data to support FDA approval and requests for reimbursement to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and/or third-party payers.

The Future: SNM needs your help on each of these issues. A surprisingly small number of calls or visits to a representative's office can generate action on a topic of concern. Please visit SNM's online legislative action center at www.snm.org/action or contact SNM Health Policy and Regulatory Affairs Department staff at hpra@snm.org for more information on how you can help. Every bit helps in our work to manage the impact of the 3 “Rs” on molecular imaging and nuclear medicine. ✨



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