

## We Can't Control the Future, but We Can Plan for It

**N**uclear medicine as a medical specialty faces significant challenges as a result of increasing convergence with radiology, which has accelerated since the introduction of hybrid imaging, and the evolution of molecular imaging as a cross-specialty discipline. Professional radiology organizations—such as the American Board of Radiology, the American College of Radiology, and the Radiological Society of North America—are playing an increasing role in setting professional standards. At the same time, economic pressure is increasing with decreasing reimbursement for health care providers and decreasing revenues for professional medical organizations. Health care reform in the United States is putting pressure on the medical community to provide evidence that patient outcomes are improved by diagnostic tests and therapies. Health care professionals have less time and fewer financial resources to support and participate in the activities of professional organizations.

These pressures have caused increased competition among professional organizations. Radiology organizations have a significant advantage over nuclear medicine organizations because of their large size, which provides them with more financial resources, larger infrastructures, and more professional volunteers. Radiologists also significantly outnumber nuclear medicine physicians and control practice microeconomics that have resulted in fewer job opportunities for nuclear medicine physicians, causing an imbalance between supply and demand.

Despite these pressures, nuclear medicine and molecular imaging have still experienced decades of strong growth, particularly in nuclear cardiology, PET/CT, and SPECT/CT. The emergence of molecular imaging, with new radiopharmaceuticals and new technologies, is likely to result in continued growth in the coming decades.

Although the future looks good for nuclear medicine and molecular imaging, many health care professionals worry about the future of the nuclear medicine profession and of SNM. For this reason, SNM has formed a Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging 2020 Task Force. The task force will bring together a broad cross-section of health care professionals to discuss the future of our profession and our society and to make recommendations that will serve as guiding principles to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

The task force will be composed of nuclear medicine and molecular imaging professionals, including physicians, scientists, pharmacists, and technologists from academic institutions and private practice, as well as industry. Professionals will include present and past leaders, rank and file membership, and young professionals. Nuclear

medicine physicians and technologists with and without certification in radiology will be included. Administrators, health care policy experts, and representatives of patient advocacy groups also will be part of the task force.

Once formed, the task force will analyze the challenges and opportunities for the specialty of nuclear medicine in the future. The groups will also review the strengths and weaknesses of SNM as a professional leader organization for the field. Armed with that information, the task force will begin to develop scenarios for the future of nuclear medicine and molecular imaging in 2020. Potential scenarios include nuclear medicine remaining a distinct specialty from radiology, represented by a strong SNM, or nuclear medicine becoming a subspecialty of radiology, with a smaller SNM resembling a subspecialty organization. Many additional scenarios exist.

After identifying these scenarios, the Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging 2020 Task Force will determine the actions, as well as the uncontrollable events, that could lead to these possibilities. From there, a plan will be developed for SNM to maximize the likelihood of the best scenario. The task force will work as a group to develop goals and objectives for SNM to achieve this scenario by 2020.

We hope to complete this process by June 2011, leaving several years for SNM to lay the groundwork in positioning nuclear medicine and molecular imaging as a valuable medical specialty. Although we don't know exactly where the field of nuclear medicine and molecular imaging will be in the next decade, we do know that by taking a proactive approach we can preserve and grow the specialty.



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