

2015 Kocemba–Slosky Fellowship

Phillip Koo, MD, Denver, CO

The Ursula Mary Kocemba–Slosky, PhD, Professional Relations Fellowship, supported by a grant from the Education and Research Foundation for Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging, provides direct exposure to SNMMI professional relations activities as they relate to other medical societies and organizations. The 2015 recipient, Phillip Koo, MD, of Denver, CO, reports here on his fellowship experience.

In September 2015, I had the privilege of spending 9 productive and inspiring days in the Washington, DC, area as part of the Ursula Mary Kocemba–Slosky, PhD, Professional Relations Fellowship. The week began with introductions and an overview of activities at SNMMI headquarters. Although SNMMI now does more with less, staff has performed a remarkable job of rising to challenges affecting nuclear medicine, including issues such as certification and reimbursement. SNMMI has a broad mission serving a pivotal role in education, clinical practice, research, and advocacy. These activities are vital, and it is critical that we support the organization in any and all ways possible.

William T. Thorwarth, Jr., MD, CEO of the American College of Radiology (ACR); Renee Cruea, MPA, executive director of the Academy of Radiology Research (ARR); Richard Schilsky, MD, chief medical officer of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO); Deborah Kamin, RN, PhD, senior director at ASCO; Shalom Jacobovitz, CEO at the American College of Cardiology; and Kathleen Flood, CEO of the American Society of Nuclear Cardiology, were all gracious with their time and shared some of the challenges facing their organizations. Mark Milroy, CAE, vice president at the American Society of Association Executives, also provided much insight into association management. Common themes emerged, such as membership, physician engagement, reimbursement, and overall change in a health care environment transitioning from volume- to value-based care. I was constantly reminded by many of the leaders that our ultimate focus is patient care, which is an objective often forgotten or distorted when discussions center on dollars. It was reassuring to see leadership dedicated to this principle, one that requires steadfast support from the entire medical community.

I also had the pleasure of meeting with William Rogers, MD, director of the Physician Regulatory Issues Team at the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and recently appointed ICD-10 ombudsman. As the largest payer for health care in the United States, CMS plays an important role in radiopharmaceutical development. Close working relationships with leaders at CMS will be important as a means to convey the value of nuclear medicine to patient care and outcomes.

Throughout the week, I also met with leaders of trade groups, such as Michael Guastella, Executive Director of the Council of Radionuclides and Radiopharmaceuticals; Patrick Hope, JD, Executive Director of the Medical Imaging and Technology Alliance (MITA); Terri Wilson, MBA, Director of Molecular Imaging/PET at MITA; and David Nexon, PhD, Senior Executive Vice President at AdvaMed. Industry is vital to innovation and requires a close working relationship with our society in order to provide our patients with the right imaging exams and therapies at the right time.

The weekend was spent attending the SNMMI Board of Directors meeting. Time was also spent with members of the Patient Advocacy Advisory Board (PAAB). The PAAB is made up of extraordinary volunteers who represent specific patient groups or are patients themselves and have benefited from nuclear medicine. Their stories about the transformative impact of nuclear medicine in their lives are inspiring. Time with the PAAB concluded with a successful trip to Capitol Hill to obtain signatures from Congress urging CMS to withdraw proposed language in the 2016 Hospital Outpatient Prospective Payment System rule.

The goals for the fellowship were not only met, but the experience facilitated a head start on several new initiatives. One involves creation of a more formal working relationship between SNMMI and ASCO. Whether we are discussing appropriate use criteria, clinical trials, or education, coordination between the 2 societies will allow for greater benefits for our patients and members. Working closely with the ARR and other organizations, we also plan to initiate a program focusing on entrepreneurship in research. As research dollars become more scarce, it is critical to train innovators to capitalize on new market forces driving changes and decisions in medicine. Future programming will include engagements with venture capitalists and entrepreneurs, culminating in a “Dolphin Tank” session during which our researchers will have the chance to seek funding. We will also be convening a working group of Henkin fellows, Slosky fellows, and members of the Future Leaders Academy to help SNMMI develop new programs and services.

In closing, I want to thank Jack Slosky, PhD, for this wonderful opportunity in honor of his late wife. I also want to thank Virginia Pappas, CAE, and staff at SNMMI for their dedication and tireless effort in supporting the nuclear medicine community. Finally, I would like to thank the leaders of SNMMI and the volunteers who contribute in endless ways, big and small. Vast opportunities are on the horizon for nuclear medicine to enhance patient care, but these will only be realized through active engagement by all of our members.