

George E. Thoma, Jr., MD: Launching *JNM*

George E. Thoma, Jr., MD, served as chair of the Society of Nuclear Medicine (SNM) Publications Committee under Henry L. Jaffe, MD, the 1958–1959 SNM president. Although this was a time of rapid growth, with a proliferation of techniques and applications, much uncertainty lingered about the future of the field as a distinct medical specialty. Jaffe, Thoma, and several other SNM leaders discussed the possibility of starting a journal that would serve as a focal point for medical practitioners using radionuclides in their practice, as the official organ for the society, and as an incentive for recruitment of new members. One journal, *Nucleonics*, had been published by McGraw-Hill since 1947, with a focus on technique and broadly covering new nuclear medicine applications. The most important nuclear medicine articles, however, were scattered across a broad range of imaging and science journals. The group believed that a dedicated peer-reviewed journal was needed as a focus for the growing profession.

In an interview with Newsline, Thoma remembered that cost was a concern that almost held SNM back from starting its own journal. “Finally Henry said ‘Let’s just do it, and if we run into trouble, I’ll help out,’” he recalled. Thoma was appointed as the first editor and, throughout 1959, worked to recruit an extraordinary editorial board of experts in radiation and radioisotope applications. *The Journal of Nuclear Medicine* launched in 1960 as a quarterly publication, with the hope that subsequent influence and popularity could justify a monthly publication.

From the beginning, the bulk of the work fell on Thoma’s shoulders as the first editor. “I used to sit at the dining room

table at 3:00 AM copyediting manuscripts,” he told Newsline. “We didn’t have any staff besides my secretary.” Although a managing administrator was soon added, Thoma maintained a (literal) hands-on approach throughout his tenure as executive editor: soliciting and reviewing articles, sending letters of acceptance and rejection, suggesting revisions, copyediting manuscripts, preparing issues for submission to the printer, and proofing galleys.

Thoma relied heavily on the cooperative work of the editorial board and reviewers. The first editorial board (see inset box) included some of the most distinguished individuals in a field that was little more than a decade old. “The editorial board was great,” Thoma told Newsline. “The most difficult aspect of my work was in turning down papers, and the board and reviewers helped in making those decisions. It was still difficult to let people know that their articles would not be accepted.” Another difficulty was dealing with the quality of writing in even those articles with important content. At a time when many of the conventions of consistent medical writing were often ignored, “most of the articles needed to be rewritten,” he said.

Thoma remained *JNM* editor for more than a decade, seeing the journal through the 1964 initiation of monthly publication and a 1969–1970 transition to editorial leadership by Belton A. Burrows, MD. Although his career in administration at St. Louis University would take him away from direct daily work in nuclear medicine, he followed the journal closely and maintained a keen interest in its growth and evolution.

The First *JNM* Editorial Board

In a 1986 interview with *JNM* Newsline, Dr. Thoma provided the following notes on the original group of individuals who made up the 1960 editorial board for *The Journal of Nuclear Medicine* under his direction as founding editor. “Looking back on the history of nuclear medicine, the editorial board of the first issue of *JNM* was pretty fabulous,” he said.

Associate Editors

Titus C. Evans, PhD, a radiobiologist from the University of Iowa, also very active in the Radiation Research Society.

Eugene L. Saenger, MD, who established the radioisotope laboratory at the University of Cincinnati and became an expert on radiation accidents.

Niel Wald, MD, who set up the first radioisotope laboratory in Hiroshima and did hematologic studies for atomic bomb survivors. He also established the radiation health program at the University of Pittsburgh.

Consulting Editorial Board

Kenneth D.A. Allen, MD, a radiologist from Denver, CO, who edited the U.S. Army’s *History of Radiology in World War II*.

Gould A. Andrews, MD, chairman of the Medical Division at Oak Ridge from 1961 to 1975.

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William H. Beierwaltes, MD, physician-in-charge of nuclear medicine at the University of Michigan from 1952 to 1986. He devised a method for radioiodine therapy for thyroid carcinoma in the 1950s and later developed ^{131}I NP-59 for imaging adrenal glands and ^{131}I -MIBG for diagnosis and treatment of pheochromocytoma.

Benedict Cassen, PhD, a physicist at UCLA. He developed the first medical directional gamma counter in 1949 and designed and built the first scintillation area (rectilinear) scanner in 1950.

Eliot Corday, PhD, director of nuclear medicine at Cedars–Sinai in Los Angeles in the late 1940s. He did some of the very early work in studies of cardiac blood flow and ischemic myocardium and was the first to adapt the Holter monitor for clinical use.

Charles L. Dunham, MD, chief of the Division of Biology and Medicine at the Atomic Energy Commission.

Clement A. Finch, MD, a hematologist and chairman of medicine at the University of Washington in Seattle.

Norman J. Holter, MA, MS, an independent inventor in Helena, MT, who developed the Holter monitor. He also served as a safety engineer on the Manhattan Project.

Howard B. Hunt, MD, chairman of radiology at the University of Nebraska. His research interests covered radiotherapy and oncology.

E. Richard King, Capt. USN (MC), chief of the radioisotope laboratory at the U.S. Naval Hospital in Bethesda, MD, in the early 1950s. He wrote one of the first books, *Atomic Medicine*, on the new specialty.

John H. Lawrence, MD, director of the Donner Laboratory of Medical Physics and Biophysics from 1948 to 1972. He became the first to employ artificial radioactivity for therapeutic applications, when he used ^{32}P to treat leukemia.

Warren K. Sinclair, PhD, head of physics at M.D. Anderson in Houston, TX. He helped develop one of the first ^{60}Co teletherapy units and became president of the National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurements.

Joseph Sternberg, MD, University of Montreal, was instrumental in establishing the World Federation of Nuclear Medicine and Biology.

Shields Warren, MD, a pathologist at New England Deaconess Hospital in Boston, MA. He did early work in studying the pathologic effects of radiation

Robert E. Zipf, MD, chief pathologist and head of nuclear medicine at the Miami Valley Hospital in Dayton, OH. He also used radiotracer techniques for research in NASA's Apollo space program and did toxicology studies in animals on the products of the atomic bomb.

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especially to other organizations and licensing bodies, that agreed upon standards are followed. The ABMS is currently supporting development of a new MOC assessment platform for use by member boards that would be much too expensive for the ABNM to develop by itself (1). The work of the ABMS is transparent to

most diplomates, but the value it provides is high compared to the cost for the ABNM.

REFERENCE

1. Parker JA. From the ABNM: Practice of nuclear medicine. *J Nucl Med.* 2015; 56(11):18N.