

SNMMI Scientific Delegation to Cuba

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As the delegation leader, I am pleased to summarize the first SNMMI Scientific Delegation visit to Cuba, October 9–14. This historic visit was initiated by an invitation from the Cuban Public Health Ministry and arranged by Professionals Abroad, Inc. (Washington, DC). SNMMI leadership and members of the society's board of directors endorsed this proposition in June 2017, followed by an e-mail announcement to the full membership. The delegation traveled under the Office of Foreign Assets Control regulation 31 CFR §515.564 General License for Professional Research. This license supports access to the highest-level professionals in Cuba.

Eighteen delegates and 3 guests (including 5 past SNMMI presidents and 2 past American College of Nuclear Medicine presidents) participated. In addition to me, delegates and guests included Dane and Twyla Bartel, DO, MBA; Anna-Liisa Brownell, PhD; Delphine Chen, MD; Dominique Delbeke, MD, PhD; Viviana and Giuseppe Esposito, MD; Frederic Fahey, ScD; Michael Graham, MD, PhD; Frederick Grant, MD; Peter Herscovitch, MD; Marilyn and Robert Metzger, PhD; Sarah Pauley, MD; Lalitha Ramanna, MD; Arif Sheikh, MD; Nancy and David Shelton, MD; Jack Slosky, PhD; and Xiankai Sun, PhD.

The travelers gathered early on October 9 at the Miami (FL) International Airport to board the approximately 1-h flight to Havana. The 5-day stay was at the comfortable and well-maintained Meliá Cohiba Hotel in Havana. The delegation was managed effectively and efficiently every day by a travel representative from Professionals Abroad, Inc.

(Sylvia Griffin), a knowledgeable travel guide (Amircal Salermo Llanes), and a skilled bus driver.

The delegation benefited from several lecture presentations on the status of the Cuban health care system, which enjoys respectable public health outcomes comparable to those in more developed countries. The delegation also learned about scholarly and entrepreneurship activities in biotechnology, genetic engineering, radiobiology, immunology, and oncology. We also visited the Cuban Isotope Center, the Western Scientific Pole, the University of Havana School of Medicine, and major hospitals, including the Hermanos Ameijeiras Hospital, which was dedicated by Fidel Castro in 1982. We learned that the country's first cyclotron facility is being built and is expected to be operational in early 2018. There are 3 PET/CT, 4 SPECT/CT, and 10 SPECT camera systems in Havana (population 2 million) and 3 SPECT camera systems in the rest of the country (population 11.2 million). The Cuban Health Ministry has a 6-year plan to upgrade nuclear medicine services by 2020. At the National Institute of Oncology and Radiobiology in Havana, nuclear medicine services in 2016 included 2,500 bone scans, 300 renal scans, 1,250 radioiodine scintigraphy scans, 581 radioiodine treatments, and 35 ⁶⁸Ga-DOTATATE PET scans. No FDG PET/CT scans are currently performed in the country, although this will soon change with the upcoming operation of the new cyclotron. Cuban medical education offers no primary nuclear medicine specialty training. Physicians specialized in other fields (e.g., oncology) may train secondarily in nuclear medicine and as determined by the labor supply needs of the country.

On the cultural side, the delegates visited the Morro Castle, the Malecón esplanade, old Havana (with its many interesting historic sites and alleys, including the Floridita Bar), the Museum of the Revolution, the Fusterlandia art community, and Cojimar fishing village. The delegation also enjoyed meals at many paladars (private restaurants), listening and dancing to Cuban music, and, of course, shopping for souvenirs, including Cuban handicrafts, art, and clothes. We also enjoyed seeing the beautiful 1950s and 1960s restored cars on the streets of Havana. The delegates agreed that the trip exceeded expectations. I want to thank all who facilitated, administered, and participated in this memorable event. I personally look forward to more of these international educational visits for SNMMI members in the future.



SNMMI scientific delegation and guests at the Hermanos Ameijeiras Hospital in Havana, Cuba.