SNMMI Strong: Advancing the Profession through Advocacy, Collaboration, and Awareness

Vasken Dilsizian, MD, SNMMI President

Although the past few months have been extremely challenging for SNMMI and its members, this has been a productive year with strong forward momentum for the society and the profession. Here are some highlights of what we have been able to accomplish.

Regulatory and Legislative Success. SNMMI has achieved notable progress on the regulatory front this year. The year started with publication by the U.S. Pharmacopeia (USP) of a new chapter for nuclear medicine that, for the first time, recognizes compounded sterile radiopharmaceuticals and provides standards for their preparation, which will help ensure the best possible care for patients.

SNMMI, working with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and in collaboration with peer societies, achieved a major save: instead of making technical component cuts of as much as 80% to myocardial PET reimbursement, CMS will continue to pay the technical component according to contractor pricing in 2020. In addition, instead of a significant (as much as 157%) decrease in reimbursement for SPECT studies, SNMMI members saw a 3.5% increase for 2020. More recently, SNMMI identified coding errors that would have led to incorrect reimbursement for nuclear medicine procedures, and CMS has taken steps to correct the situation.

The society's productive relationship with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) continued this year with FDA approval of a New Drug Application for ^{68}Ga-DOTATOC injection for PET imaging in localization of somatostatin receptor–positive neuroendocrine tumors (NETs) in adult and pediatric patients. Also notable: the agency added arginine and lysine to its bulk drug substances list, which will help patients with gastroenteropancreatic NETs undergoing ^{177}Lu-DOTATATE therapy.

SNMMI has been working persistently to educate the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) on the training and experience necessary to administer radiopharmaceuticals. Most recently, SNMMI participated in a briefing at NRC headquarters during which we highlighted the importance of appropriate training and experience requirements for authorized users, addressed concerns about patient safety and patient release materials, and spoke about the future of the field. We expect a ruling within the next few months.

On the legislative front, SNMMI collaborated with clinicians, patients, and industry representatives to advance H.R. 3772, the Medicare Diagnostic Radiopharmaceutical Payment Equity Act of 2019. The society coordinated introduction of the bill, cohosted a Capitol Hill briefing, and conducted a vigorous grassroots letter-writing and lobbying campaign in support of the bill, which calls for all diagnostic radiopharmaceuticals that reach a cost of more than $500 per day to be paid separately in the Hospital Outpatient Prospective Payment System. Successful enactment would be significant for hospitals and for patients.

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Taking the Lead on Therapeutics. From October 25 to 27, SNMMI held its inaugural Therapeutics Conference—Therapies, Theranostics, and Building Your Radionuclide Clinical Practice—in Las Vegas, NV. The conference explored the latest innovations in therapy, including information on acquiring knowledge and resources to effectively deliver theranostic agents and the fundamental steps necessary to establish an institutional nuclear medicine therapy program. The meeting welcomed referring physicians and others seeking to learn more about the profession. SNMMI will be repeating the conference in the coming year.

In December, SNMMI's Therapy Center of Excellence and Clinical Trials Network collaborated with the National Cancer Institute (NCI) on the fifth Theranostic Consensus Conference. The symposium focused on the question, "What is the goal with radionuclide therapies: palliative, curative, or adjuvant treatment?" and covered dose optimization, treatment efficacy, clinical trial design, and strategies. This meeting continues to be highly attended. Proceedings from the meeting will be published in 2020.

Collaborating with Peer Societies and the International Community. Collaboration with peer societies, both domestic and international, has been another focus this past year. Referring physicians—cardiologists, oncologists, endocrinologists, neurologists, and others—are vital partners in ensuring positive outcomes for patients. Working with these clinical colleagues is key to advancing patient care.

SNMMI is collaborating with the American Society of Nuclear Cardiology to develop an 80-hour course to ensure members have adequate training and are up to date on NRC requirements. SNMMI and the American Society for Radiation Oncology have developed a Care Pathway Working Group that drafted a report entitled "Patient-Centered Path

of Care for Targeted Radiopharmaceutical Therapies," which will soon be published.

The society is working on projects with both the International Atomic Energy Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy to make the benefits of nuclear and molecular imaging more available worldwide, particularly in resource-challenged countries.

SNMMI continues to participate in the Nuclear Medicine Global Initiative (NMGI), which has begun work on training requirements/education/recommendations for the practice of theranostics. The project, led by Jean-Luc Urbain, MD, PhD, aims to define the global availability of theranostics and impediments to training and education in the specialty. Another NMGI group, led by Andrew Scott, MD, is drafting a summary of its project on the availability of radiopharmaceuticals around the world.

Reaching Out Early to Medical Students. The use of nuclear medicine imaging and therapy will expand over the coming decades, so SNMMI is working on a number of initiatives to enhance the pipeline of medical students pursuing a career in the field. The society's bylaws now include a membership category for medical students. SNMMI is exhibiting at medical conferences to introduce students in person to the field. In addition, we have established new research grants to introduce high-achieving students to nuclear medicine, molecular imaging, and targeted radiotherapy as a potential career path by supporting their participation in a related research project.

Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic. In March, as COVID-19 escalated across the world, SNMMI launched a COVID-19 Resource Center to consolidate information and resources to support members. The center includes information specific to nuclear medicine, such as advice on ventilation/perfusion studies and updates on radioisotope supply, as well as useful articles from *The Journal of Nuclear Medicine*, government agency resources on COVID-19, resources from other societies and organizations, and training and certification resources from nuclear medicine–related boards and associations. SNMMI has also launched a forum where members can raise issues and share solutions to COVID-related problems.

In coming months SNMMI will be working to engage the media in telling the story of nuclear medicine through a series of articles to raise awareness of this extraordinary medical discipline and, in particular, therapeutics. Our profession is taking enormous strides toward curing cancer. The public needs to know what nuclear medicine is, what it is doing, and where it will take us in the coming decade.

IAEA Launches Curie Fellowships for Women

On March 9 at its headquarters in Vienna, Austria, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) launched a fellowship program to provide incentives for young women considering a career in nuclear science and technology. The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship Program is intended to increase the number of women studying in nuclear science and technology and nonproliferation studies through scholarships and work experience opportunities.

The IAEA will provide scholarships at an accredited university for up to 2 years for women pursuing a graduate degree in nuclear sciences and technologies or nonproliferation studies. Selected recipients will also have the opportunity to pursue 6–12-mo internships at the IAEA related to their fields of study. The program is open for students from IAEA Member States who meet the following criteria: female candidates; above average academic credentials; fluency in Arabic, English, Chinese, French, Russian, or Spanish; and acceptance by an accredited university for a relevant Master's course. Up to 100 women per year will be selected, subject to availability of funding. The scholarship will cover university tuition fees up to a maximum of €10,000 per year and a lump sum payment for living expenses based on the cost of living for the university's location, up to a maximum of €10,000 per year. Geographical balance will be part of internal selection criteria. Fellowships will be awarded once per year. The first round of fellowships will be awarded for the academic year starting in 2021.

An outreach toolbox is under development to support universities and partners to encourage applications from qualified candidates. A dedicated webpage and, eventually, an alumni portal will be created, highlighting partners as well as students.

Countries expressing support included: Belgium, Canada, China, France, Japan, Kuwait, Morocco, The Netherlands, Pakistan, Paraguay, Poland, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Uruguay. The G77 group of countries, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the European Union, the Texas A&M system, the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation, and the Ban Ki-moon Centre for Global Citizens also expressed their support for the fellowship program.

Introductory information on the program is available at: https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/20/03/marie-curie-fellowship-programme.pdf. A related video and updated information are available at: https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/multimedia/videos/marie-sklodowska-curie-fellowship-programme-launches.

International Atomic Energy Agency