

TERC and NMT Evaluation: Report III

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A 1972 survey by Technical Education Research Centers of people in the nuclear medicine field was intended primarily to evaluate TERC's activities for improving NMT education. The survey was also useful in obtaining information about career satisfaction, and in eliciting opinions regarding trends in both education and research. There were 221 people responding to the survey—a 68% response rate.

Career Satisfaction

How do you feel about a career in nuclear medicine was one of the questions asked. Of the 159 who responded to this item, 22% checked the response alternative, "It's the only career that could really satisfy me," and 67% checked "It's one of several careers which I could find equally satisfying." Overall, 89% indicated varying degrees of satisfaction with their career in nuclear medicine.

Fourteen percent of the respondents indicated that nuclear medicine was either not a satisfying career or one about which they might well have ambivalent feelings. Seven percent checked the response alternate, "It's not the most satisfying career I can think of, everything considered," and another 7% responded that it was "A career I decided on without considering whether I would find it most satisfying."

The variety in pathways to nuclear medicine may be one reason that 67% of the respondents indicated that nuclear medicine is one of the several careers which they could find equally satisfying. Of the 221 respondents to the survey, 35% are technologists, 21% physicians, and 13% professors and instructors. The remaining 31% indicated that they were, with respect to their primary function in nuclear medicine, technical directors, administrators, and physicists. These people have

come into nuclear medicine through several routes, mainly x-ray technology and radiology. Only 15% of those surveyed had always been involved in nuclear medicine.

Trends and Issues

A survey question that elicited informative responses was, "What are some of the more important issues and problems in NMT education/training?" Sixty-eight percent of the respondents wrote answers.

Among topics commented upon, curriculum was the problem most frequently mentioned (16%). Respondents pointed to the need for curriculum to be standardized among all NMT training programs. As one person wrote, "A big issue to me is one TERC is already attempting to do—that is, to unify the entire training programs now available."

Other curriculum problems cited related to emphasizing basic subjects (one respondent stated succinctly, "Lack of basics—and patients suffer from this") and the need for incorporating training in emerging areas such as radiopharmaceuticals. There was also concern expressed with the curriculum content of clinical training. An example of such concern was the comment, "Clinical training is, in some cases, free service for hospitals—junior college programs would help this."

The second largest group of responses related to certification and licensure of NMT's. Thirteen percent of all those who returned the questionnaire referred to this issue. Among the statements were: "There should be one and only one registry exam!"

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A problem is "licensing which prohibits a career ladder approach in medical fields." "Subcertification of technicians into 'wets' and 'drys' (would be useful)."

Smaller numbers of respondents referred to such issues as the need for more training programs in NMT; the desirability of affiliating hospital-based programs with universities or community colleges so that the student receives a degree; and the problem of what might be called a "boundary dispute"—whether particular procedures will occur within radiology or pathology.

Respondents were interested in attracting qualified students: "[A problem is] finding intelligent people to train who are looking for a career rather than a paycheck." Adequate preparation of these students before entering an NMT program was also mentioned as a problem. Some people suggested that student stipends might assist in recruiting students.

There were 33 comments on issues and problems in NMT training which could not be easily categorized. These comments dealt with education in ways ranging from a belief that in-service training sessions are too frequently directed toward the physician rather than the technologist, to the

plaintive statement by a physician, "I need more time for teaching".

While 61 people returning the TERC evaluation questionnaire chose not to write any comments regarding issues in NMT education, only two responded, in effect, "There aren't any problems. Everything is o.k."

Impact of Research Developments on NMT Activities

The survey tapped trends in research by asking an open-ended question, "What developments, if any, in nuclear medicine research may change the activities of NMTs?" Fifty-nine percent of the respondents wrote comments.

Most respondents writing comments about research trends pointed to the increased use of computer technology in conjunction with nuclear medicine procedures. Most respondents also referred to the introduction of new radiopharmaceuticals. Greater frequency of in vitro tests, especially radioimmunoassays, was noted by almost every respondent who replied to this question.

A related question was, "Do these developments require additional skills and/or knowledge on the part of NMTs?" Over 70% checked the "yes" response; 6% checked "no"; 24% were unsure whether or not new skills would be required.