The first of the year has always been a time for assessing the "state of the union" and making resolutions for change. We traditionally look at where we've been, where we are now, and where we hope to go. Each year the incoming NMTCB Chairman of the Board has to reflect on such notions to help focus on the upcoming year's Board business. I would like to use this column as an opportunity to offer readers a brief NMTCB "state of the union" address.

WHERE WE HAVE BEEN

Since its inception in 1977, the directors and office staff of the NMTCB have been committed to providing a psychometrically sound certification examination for nuclear medicine technologists. Blessed with strong leadership, a dedicated volunteer Board of Directors, and an extremely hardworking home office staff, the NMTCB has continued year after year to effectively meet its mission. Throughout the decade of the nineties, the NMTCB worked to develop, implement, and maintain one of the most unique computerized certification examinations in existence. Through its partnership with ACT (American College Testing), the NMTCB began offering its entry-level certification examinations via nationwide computer centers year-round. The testing algorithm for these exams, based on the principles of Item Response Theory (IRT), requires significantly fewer items than the traditional paper-and-pencil exams of the past to make a classification decision. This modification drastically reduced the time necessary to complete the exams. The current version immediately calculates a decision after having given the examinee a maximum of 90 items. The examinees are allowed 1 hour and 45 minutes to complete the exams and are notified at the end of their session as to whether or not they have passed. The computer also generates a completely different set of items for each examinee, which helps to ensure exam security and the reliability of the scores.

WHERE WE ARE

The delivery process for the NMTCB's computerized entry-level certification examinations continues to run smoothly. The Board's primary task for these exams at this time is to write new items that, after successful pretesting and statistical analysis, are to be added to the database from which the computer selects its items. Quality control procedures ensure that scored items are routinely evaluated for their effectiveness and appropriateness to current practice.

Today's excitement centers around the new nuclear cardiology specialty examination that has just been developed by the NMTCB during recent years. This exam was first administered with great success last summer at the SNM's Annual Meeting in Toronto. Because the potential number of people seeking specialty certification in nuclear cardiology is relatively small, the Board decided that a paper-and-pencil exam offered at a few choice sites each year would be the most cost-effective manner in which to offer the cardiac examinations. The second edition is currently under construction and will be ready for a summer administration. The 2002 version of the nuclear cardiology certification examination is scheduled to be given on June 15 and will be offered at two sites this year—one concurrent with the SNM Annual Meeting in Los Angeles and the other in Atlanta, GA. Anyone interested in obtaining NMTCB nuclear cardiology certification should visit the NMTCB Web site (www.nmtcb.org). The site has a nuclear cardiology examinations link that provides a list of the eligibility requirements, a content outline, and the details for applying to sit for this examination.

WHERE WE ARE GOING

Being a group that never sits still, the NMTCB has several large projects planned for the not-too-distant future. The first task is the development of a specialty examination for PET. PET has very quickly become a driving force in the field and, like nuclear cardiology, there are a significant number of nuclear medicine technologists working only in the PET arena. The Board has heard from many practitioners and administrators who insist that the time for this professional certification is now. To create this specialty examination, two critical tasks must be completed. There is little argument that the knowledge domain of the PET technology differs significantly in many ways from that of routine clinical nuclear medicine. Identifying the exact content areas of that domain will be the initial hurdle. Once this domain has been defined, item-writers can use this blueprint to begin drafting items for possible inclusion. If you currently work in PET and would like to assist the Board with examinations development, please contact the NMTCB office.

Another major project being discussed among members of the NMTCB's Long-Range Planning Committee is the possible development of a continued competency examination. There has always been much public and government concern that health care professionals be evaluated for competency in their respective fields. What exactly constitutes competency has been the subject of much debate. Few, however, would disagree that any list of characteristics identifying a competent professional would include having a command of the knowledge needed to effectively function in the role. The field of nuclear medicine is very dynamic in nature. To remain competent, one has to continuously keep abreast of the changes in the field and understand how those changes affect daily practice. Please keep in mind that this project is currently in the very early planning stages and has yet to be approved by the Board, but the plan would be to require nuclear medicine technologists who have passed the entry-level examinations to sit for a continued competency examination every so often to maintain their certification. This exam would be completely different from the entry-level examination, and the expectation would be that the test items would be designed to assess a more advanced level of understanding of nuclear medicine technology. The exact length of the certification period has not been determined, but other professions who require re-certification typically set a 5- to 7-y cycle. The plan is that

this re-examination process would take place only for those who were certified after a specified date. Those already certified before that date would not be required to take the examinations to maintain their certification. This adoption process also mirrors that of other professional certification organizations. If a re-certification requirement becomes a reality, the adoption date would be set years in advance so that those considering nuclear medicine as a career would be well aware that they would have to re-test every fixed number of years after their initial certification date. Another expectation would be that, because the potential number of re-certification examinees would be at least as large as the number of entry-level examinees each year, the test could be computerized and offered year-round. We are planning to include an item on the annual renewal form survey asking whether or not you think requiring re-certification is a good idea. If there is great support from the membership, the development of such an exam may move quickly from Long-Range Planning's agenda to that of the Executive Board.

CONTACT US

For further information on the NMTCB and its activities, please visit our Web site at www.nmtcb.org or contact the NMTCB office at: NMTCB, 2970 Clairmont Rd., Suite 935, Atlanta, GA 30329-1634; phone (404) 315-1739; e-mail: board@nmtcb.org.