

Recruitment into Nuclear Medicine Technology Schools: A Solution to Shortages

Across the country today nuclear medicine departments are screaming for qualified technologists. In light of this, a nuclear medicine technology Educators' Forum, cosponsored by the Academic Affairs Committee of the Technologist Section and the Academic Council of the Society of Nuclear Medicine took place in June 1981. At this forum, some program directors indicated that the number of qualified student applicants had declined during the past few years.

The Joint Review Committee on Educational Programs in Nuclear Medicine Technology (JRCNMT) included in its 1981 annual report a survey that compared the number of graduates over the past three years with each school's capacity. According to Elaine Cuklanz, JRCNMT Executive Director, 110 of the 130 schools responded to this survey. The percentage of graduates-to-openings in 1979, 1980, and 1981 was 63%, 63%, and 60%, respectively. The projected number of graduates-to-approved openings for 1981-82 is 70%. However, an attrition rate of 10% is expected and this brings the 1982 graduates-to-opening ratio to a more realistic 60%. The results of this survey indicate that nuclear medicine technology schools are actually holding ground. Thus the problem is more likely that as nuclear medicine departments expand through normal growth and the introduction of nuclear cardiology with its associated increased computer usage, additional technologists are needed. In concert with this, nuclear medicine technologists are leaving the field of basic technology and entering other related job markets such as computer applications and sales. Then the job attrition rate often "snowballs." As more leave the field while the number entering it remains steady, the work load often becomes more demanding to remaining technologists. This in turn makes the related job market more appealing. The obvious solution is to plug the gap of those leaving and increase the number of technologists entering the field.

Recruitment is the responsibility of the nuclear medicine technology educator, but it is also the responsibility of every technologist who wishes to keep the profession alive with competent technologists. Unless enough technologists enter the field, hospitals are going to be forced to accept less qualified individuals such as "nuclear medicine assistants" (1).

I would like to suggest some different means of recruiting individuals into nuclear medicine technology schools. A number of these suggestions are aimed at program directors but others relate to staff and supervisory technologists not working in program-affiliated institutions. To keep the profession viable, recruitment is *everyone's* business.

Perhaps each one of us should recall how he or she first heard of nuclear medicine. It is likely that it was not through a fancy audiovisual but most probably by word of mouth. It is possible that this personal type of public relations—that we as individuals do—could satisfy our recruitment needs.

Brochures are also available as a means of advertising. "What is Nuclear Medicine Technology . . ." is available free from the Society of Nuclear Medicine. The American College of Nuclear Physicians has prepared "What is Nuclear Medicine?" (American College of Nuclear Physicians, Suite 700, 1101 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20036). Another pamphlet is "About Nuclear Medicine." (Channing L. Bete Co. Inc., 200 State Rd., South Dearfield, MA 01373). Occasionally radio-pharmaceutical companies provide informational materials. Most nuclear medicine schools offer brochures explaining their programs. It is important that the design and information in a school brochure make the desired first impression. If no brochure exists, a school is strongly encouraged to develop one. Distributing brochures is a relatively inexpensive means of reaching potential students. Brochures can be sent to high school and college counselors and instructors in physics, chemistry, and biology. They can be placed in physician and hospital waiting areas. Portions of the Technical Educator Research Center's (TERC) 1972 publication entitled, "Materials and Methods Useful in the Recruitment of Students into Nuclear Medicine Technology Training Programs" contain information on preparing such recruitment materials as brochures and audiovisuals. Certain sections in the document are dated but much of the information is still useful (Technical Education Research Centers/NE, 44 Brattle St., Cambridge, MA 02138).

Audiovisual aids for recruitment in nuclear medicine technology are scarce. A film is available from the Rochester Institute of Technology (Jerome Wagner, Rochester Institute of Technology, Nuclear Medicine Program, Rochester, NY 14623). Although it is three years old, this 10-min film is still considered a useful recruitment tool by a number of schools. Because of the variety of nuclear medicine technology schools, a film or slide show presentation developed by the Technologist Section would have to be very general. In some instances, it is feasible for schools to develop their own audiovisuals for recruitment, as Rochester did. In considering the target audience I suggest developing a slide show that can be used with various taped scripts, each with appropriate information for the high school student, college student, and counselor.

Another means of media advertisement is to develop radiosspots. Television is also available but extremely expensive.

The print media is one of the most useful means of advertising. College newspaper ads are inexpensive and reach large numbers of college students. While more expensive, major city newspapers are another means of advertising. If it is possible to get a job-related human interest story about a particular nuclear medicine technologist into a major newspaper, the free publicity can go a long way. Check in your area to see if career counselors have newsletters that can be used as a means of advertising.

Word of mouth is another important means of recruitment. Career days and health fairs can be attended by program directors and other technologists or students. One suggestion is to have a ready-to-go suitcase exhibit that can be easily assembled for demonstration. Groups such as Explorer Scouts, the YMCA, high school physics and chemistry classes, science clubs, and R.T. schools have been valuable target audiences for some program directors. Regional and state fairs often provide exhibit space for career development displays at no charge.

When it is difficult to go to potential applicants, have them come to you. Department tours for any of the prior-mentioned groups are another route for recruitment. Hospital volunteer groups offer another source as a potential interest group.

Keep in touch with high school and college counselors. A good time to talk with college counselors is just prior to their students' registration. Some schools will also allow poster displays on bulletin boards. Again an opportune time for this is during registration. Posters with tear-off, self-addressed postcards for the prospective applicant to complete and mail to a nuclear medicine technology school can be effective.

Also, your state may provide a counseling service for various career groups; Indiana, for example, provides this type of service. Job placement services in colleges may provide names of potential students. Too often the graduate with a major in biology or a similar science finds there is no job market and nuclear medicine technology may be the answer.

Program directors may be unaware of such services as the American College Testing Program (ACT). Schools that participate in the ACT assessment may pay a fee and reach prospective students through the Educational Opportunity Service. Besides ACT scores, data are gathered from a 191-question student profile. Students that meet the specified criteria set by a nuclear medicine technology school are then notified by ACT. In this way individuals may find that they qualify to apply to certain nuclear medicine technology schools (Educational Opportunity Service, the American College Testing Program, PO Box 168, Iowa City, IA 52243).

These suggestions are for individual schools and technologists. As a group effort schools may organize recruitment by city, state, or region to alleviate costs. An interesting network operating in California for medical technology programs is a student record center. This nonprofit organization matches students to medical technology programs. The student applicant pays a fee and completes a standardized application form. Enrollment qualifications for participating schools are listed in a directory. After a student applicant specifies which schools receive the information, the record center attempts to match the student with appropriate schools. Similar systems are in operation in Missouri, Michigan, Illinois, and Connecticut. The matching programs are not managed through a national organization, but rather on a state or regional basis. It is feasible that they might be willing to expand and list such other allied health areas as nuclear medicine technology.

I hope that I have suggested some recruitment methods not previously considered. Recruitment is everyone's business in nuclear medicine technology. Nursing schools are also using "beefed-up" recruitment techniques today. Schools of medical technology are feeling the effects of decreased applicants as well. Nuclear medicine schools also compete with new modalities such as C.T. and ultrasound for R.T. graduates. The public's concern with the use of radioactive materials has not helped our image. Nonmedical occupations are more available today, and of course there are fewer young people to recruit because of the end of the post World War II "baby boom." The list of reasons could continue. But above all, recruitment should be positive. We should not make excuses become self-fulfilling for the future of nuclear medicine technology. It is important to determine where all the nuclear medicine technologists have gone. But it is equally important to find their replacements and increase the numbers being trained.

The most important message is that recruitment is no longer just the concern of nuclear medicine technology program directors but of everyone involved in nuclear medicine. We must make the prospective technologist aware of our field and its opportunities if nuclear medicine is to remain a viable profession of qualified individuals.

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References

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