
Letter to the Editor

A NEW SPECIALTY FOR NMTs

Over the past few years, some of us have been forced to relinquish the practice of preparing our own radiopharmaceuticals within our respective facilities. While I dare not tread on this still controversial enterprise, I will offer a suggestion to those whose skills have been replaced by an assembly line.

There is still a need for the special skills of the NMT in the hospital, and in increasing numbers hospital administrators and physicians are beginning to recognize this. There is a most definite need for the skills of nuclear medicine technologists in the area of emergency response. Not just ordinary medical emergencies, such as broken bones, lacerations, stomach ailments, etc., but also in radiation emergencies, such as the uncontrolled and unexpected release of radioactive materials. Transportation accidents and industrial accidents can occur at any time in any location in the United States. Granted, these types of accidents are rare, but they do happen and few hospitals have the necessary resources to adequately respond to the needs of the victims of radiation accidents. This is primarily the result of the lack of training provided by nursing and medical schools in the treatment and handling of contaminated patients. This is where a nuclear medicine technologist can take up some of the slack, particularly in hospitals where there are no medical physicists or radiation safety officers who would normally assist the radiologist or emergency room physician in responding to such an incident.

It is a perfect opportunity for trained nuclear medicine tech-

nologists to assist a physician in charge with conducting in-house seminars on the special considerations to be applied when dealing with radioactivity. Useful topics for discussion might include: (1) How to recognize the presence of radioactivity in a patient; (2) What hazard does the contaminated or irradiated patient present to the medical staff? (3) What is the difference between contamination and irradiation? (4) How do we control contamination in the hospital and how do we handle radioactivity safely?

These are just a few of the aspects to be considered by well-trained personnel when dealing with radioactivity. In addition to conducting training sessions, the nuclear medicine technologist can become an important member of the hospital's response team by making available equipment, such as scintillation cameras and thyroid uptake probes, which can readily be used for radionuclide contamination screening and as measuring devices.

The nuclear medicine technologist is also an excellent resource person for hospitals in need of some assistance in formulating a response plan to deal with contaminated individuals who could appear at any time. The Radiation Emergency Assistance Center/Training Site (REAC/TS), operated by Oak Ridge Associated Universities for the US Department of Energy, offers such a program. The REAC/TS facility is located in Oak Ridge, TN, and there is no tuition fee.

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