

**Professional Respect:
Is It a Right or Is It Earned?**

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Professionalism is an ill defined characteristic although it is an easily recognized attribute in an individual or group. Several years ago, the Technologist Section's long-range planning committee set an objective regarding professionalism. Simply stated, it proclaimed that nuclear medicine technology be recognized as a respected profession. While a noble pursuit, it was a somewhat unrealistic goal for several reasons.

First, most nuclear medicine technologists are part of a large pool of health care workers that is dominated by physicians and controlled by a new wave of hospital administrators. Neither of these two groups sees a need to elevate nuclear medicine technologists to a professional level. Salaries, accountability, and increasing demands are some of the reasons cited. Anyone associated with the current environment in hospitals and clinics knows employees are being asked to do more with fewer resources and less support than previously. It is difficult to imagine an enhancement of technologists' self esteem and professional image while they are overburdened with diverse duties and have less time to perform these tasks.

A second reason for the lack of professional respect is the perceived pattern of high technologist turnover in nuclear medicine and other radiologic technologies. Few technologists and even fewer associated individuals (physicians, administrators) view a technologist's job as a long-term career choice, rather, they see it as an intermediate stop on a career path to somewhere or something else. Webster's dictionary defines professionals as those "having a particular profession as a permanent career. . .and requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation." Since most health care workers regard a technologist's occupation as temporary, it is hard for them to perceive of technologists as professionals. Perhaps, with the recent downturn in the economy and the less recent but more pronounced rise in technologists' salaries, the permanency of individuals in the nuclear medicine technology career path will increase. This should lead to a rise in the technologists' specialized knowledge curve and may pave the way toward professional recognition.

My assumptions thus far are global, and it is dangerous to generalize about a whole community. Certainly, we all know individuals in nuclear medicine technology who have earned the professional respect of their peers, colleagues, and bosses because of some attribute they possess, which they have used to contribute to nuclear medicine. Their accomplishments were probably not superhuman feats or prize winning scientific discoveries. They may not have gained national recognition for their contribution but they are respected as professionals. What separates these individuals from those who constantly complain about the lack of a professional mantle? Where does professional respect come from? In my opinion, it is earned by those individuals who consistently add to the profession by contributing in science, education, technology, or in some other worthy manner. These individuals enhance the profession through their actions, attitude, philosophy, and commitment to their career. Perhaps it is time for all of us to reflect on this approach the next time we attempt to criticize others for the lack of professional respect for nuclear medicine technologists.