

**Message from the
JRCNMT Board**

**ACCREDITATION AND THE
HEALTH PROFESSIONS**

As the health care world changes, the place of specialized accreditation in that world comes under review. Recent decisions of the ARRT and the NMTCB raised questions in the nuclear medicine technology community concerning the future of the accreditation process. Is the flexibility of this process sufficient to meet changing health care needs? Articles in various publications suggest that institutional and specialized accreditation may be redundant or adversarial. The federal government itself is taking a position that federal purpose (i.e., national good) should be demonstrated for accrediting agencies.

Purpose of Accreditation

Voluntary accreditation is a unique American process. It was established for two fundamental purposes: quality assurance and institutional and program improvement. Currently, nongovernmental institutional and programmatic agencies extend accreditation. Agency responsibilities include: establishing criteria, authorizing institutional and programmatic self-studies, visiting and evaluating institutions at their request, and accrediting those institutions and programs which meet the criteria. In the U.S., no institution or program is required to seek accreditation. Most eligible institutions and programs seek to become accredited because of the recognized value. In other countries, the maintenance of professional and educational standards is a government function.

**Role and Relationship of
Accrediting Agencies**

Accreditation is a process of recognizing educational institutions and programs for performance, integrity and quality which entitles them to the confidence of the educational community and the public.

Institutional accreditation is national or regional in scope. An institutional accrediting agency evaluates the characteristics of whole institutions. The institutional accrediting body assesses broad areas of institutions' operation such as governance and administration, financial stability, admissions and student personnel services. Institutional accrediting commissions recognize that some aspects of an institution are always stronger than others. Meeting institutional standards does not guarantee the qual-

ity of individual programs, courses or graduates.

Specialized or programmatic accreditation is granted by a number of national organizations representing a profession, such as architecture, law or medicine. Though each of these organizations has distinctive criteria, they have undertaken accreditation as a means of protecting the public against professional incompetence. The focus of specialized accreditation is on the criteria necessary for professional preparation. The close relationship of the specialized accrediting agency with the professional association(s) for the field helps ensure that the requirements for accreditation are related to the current requirements for professional practice. This specialized accreditation is recognized as providing a basic assurance of the scope and quality of professional or occupational preparation.

Both institutional and specialized agencies conduct the accreditation process using a common pattern. The pattern requires integral self-evaluation by the institution or program in relation to criteria established by recognized authorities in the higher education or professional field, peer review through an on-site evaluation visit, and recognition by an accreditation status awarded to those institutions and programs meeting the criteria.

The *CORPA Handbook (1)* states:

Institutional and specialized accreditation are complementary. The focus of an institutional accrediting agency on an institution as a total operating unit provides assurance that the general characteristics of the institution have been examined and found to be satisfactory. The focus of a specialized accrediting agency on a specific program provides assurance that the details of that particular program meet the external accreditation standards. Institutional accreditation, concerned with evaluating the institution as a whole, does not seek to deal with any particular program in great detail although programs are reviewed as a part of the consideration of the entire institution. Specialized accreditation, speaking to a specific program, does not seek to deal significantly with the general conditions of the institution, although certain general conditions

are considered in the context in which the accredited program is offered.

The *Handbook of Accreditation* by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (2) states:

Accreditation of the institution as a whole is not, and should not be interpreted as being equivalent to specialized accreditation of a part or program of the institution and should not be represented as such...specialized accreditation does not purport to make judgments on the institution as a whole.

Value of Accreditation

In fulfilling its two purposes, quality assurance and institutional and program improvement, accreditation provides service of value to several constituencies in our society. To the public, the values of accreditation include:

1. An assurance of external evaluation of the institution or program, and a finding that there is conformity to general expectations in higher education or the professional field.
2. An identification of institutions and programs which have voluntarily undertaken explicit activities directed at improving the quality of the institution and its professional programs, and are carrying them out successfully.
3. An improvement in the professional services available to the public, as accredited programs modify their requirements to reflect changes in knowledge and practice generally accepted in the field.
4. A decreased need for intervention by public agencies in the operations of educational institutions, since their institutions through accreditation are providing privately for the maintenance and enhancement of educational quality.

To students, accreditation provides:

1. An assurance that the educational activities of an accredited institution or program have been found to be satisfactory, and therefore meet the needs of students.
2. Assistance in the transfer of credits between institutions, or in the admission of students to advanced degrees through the general acceptance of credits among accredited institutions when the performance of the student has been satisfactory and the credits to be transferred are appropriate to the

receiving institution.

3 A prerequisite in many cases for entering a profession.

Institutions of higher education benefit from accreditation through:

1. The stimulus provided for self-evaluation and self-directed institutional and program improvement.
2. The strengthening of institutional and program self-evaluation by the review and counsel provided through the accrediting agency.
3. The application of criteria of accrediting agencies, generally accepted throughout higher education, which help guard against external encroachments harmful to institutional or program quality by providing benchmarks independent of forces that might impinge on individual institutions.
4. The enhancing of the reputation of an accredited institution or program because of public regard for accreditation.
5. The use of accreditation as one means by which an institution can gain eligibility for the participation of itself and its students in certain programs of governmental aid to postsecondary education; accreditation is also usually relied upon by private foundations as a highly desirable indicator of institutional and program quality.

Accreditation serves the profession by:

1. Providing a means for the participation of practitioners in setting the requirements for preparation to enter the professions.
2. Contributing to the unity of the professions by bringing together practitioners, teachers and students in an activity directed at improving professional preparation and professional practice.

Conclusion

Professional accreditation was established to ensure and protect the public with regard to the competence and

course of instruction of those individuals serving it in various professional roles. Certainly, this approach has been a significant success when viewed from the point of view of the standard of living we now take for granted, encompassing areas such as medicine, engineering and law among others.

The methodology by which accreditation occurs, whether it be institutional, programmatic or certification examination, is not in and of itself an issue. The public needs continuing assurance of quality. The existing accrediting mechanisms provide input from an extensive community of interest including the public, employers, graduates and accreditors. As with all peer-reviewed functions, it must be careful to be inclusive rather than exclusive and to be concerned with the quality of student and service provided to the public. In this light, and with these ends, the objective of professional autonomy through a partnership of educators, accreditors and regulators leads to the best protection for the public and students while continuing to provide a competent, compassionate and concerned work force in medicine.

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References

1. *CORPA handbook: provisions, procedures and policies*. Washington, DC: Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation (CORPA); 1994.
2. *Handbook of accreditation*. Oakland, CA: Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities, Western Association of Schools and Colleges; 1988.

Additional References

Manual of accreditation policies and procedures, revised. Salt Lake City, UT: Joint Review Committee on Educational Programs in Nuclear Medicine Technology; Nov. 1994.

Accreditation handbook. Seattle, WA: Commission on Colleges, Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges; 1994.

Characteristics of excellence in higher education, standards for accreditation. Philadelphia, PA: Commission on Higher Education, Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools; 1994.

Criteria for accreditation. Decatur, GA: Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of College and Schools; 1994.

Handbook of accreditation. Chicago, IL: Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools; 1994.

Standards for accreditation. Bedford, MA: Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, New England Association of Schools and Colleges; 1992.

Trachtenberg SJ, Wise AE. University presidents and accreditation agencies: serving and protecting students and the public. *The chronicle of higher education* April 26, 1996.

ACCREDITATION DECISIONS

March 29–30, 1996

Programs Granted Initial Accreditation

Broward Community College, Davie, FL

Programs Granted Continued Accreditation

The John Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, MD

University of Tennessee Medical Center at

Knoxville, Knoxville, TN

Galveston College, Galveston, TX

**Date of
Next Review**

1999

2000

1997

1999

**Programs Requesting Voluntary
Withdrawal of Accreditation**

St. Anthony Hospitals, Denver, CO

El Paso Community College, El Paso, TX

Programs Requesting Inactive Status

Alton Ochsner Medical Foundation,

New Orleans, LA

Change in Program Sponsor

From: John L. Doyné Hospital, Milwaukee, WI

To: Froedtert Memorial Lutheran Hospital, Milwaukee, WI

**Date of
Notification**

May 4, 1996

February 6, 1996

Duration

July 1996–July 1998