NUCLEAR MEDICINE TECHNOLOGY STATE OF THE UNION

Workforce issues are among the most pressing in health care today. These issues range from the current acute shortage of qualified nuclear medicine technologists (NMTs), scientists, and physicians to the impending dearth of NMTs once the baby-boomers retire from the workforce and start needing health care instead of providing it. Mix in emerging technologies and the difficulty in establishing fair reimbursement for them, add a major shift of patients from hospitals and clinics to outpatient centers, and we have some major challenges ahead.

While these challenges may seem daunting, NMTs have also witnessed major opportunities recently in health care. Salaries, benefits, and enticements have risen tremendously in the past 2 years. Suddenly, folks outside of the profession are eager to learn about nuclear medicine. In some cases, a renewed respect for technologists has been reported. Not only has the radiology world become interested, so has general medicine and the public.

The buzz about PET/CT and PET imaging has even made it to prime-time television. I was excited to see a PET scan of the brain showcased on the show *Law and Order: SVU* a few weeks back. Every few weeks, we are seeing some reference to PET on television. Newspapers and internet information providers are also beginning to take notice. Within the past several months, the SNMTS has been contacted by *USA Today*, the *New York Times*, the *Dallas Morning News*, *Monster.com*, and *AuntMinnie.com* for interviews on various topics. Camera manufacturing companies are including nuclear medicine images in their national television campaigns, and hospitals are using nuclear medicine images in their local television ads. Looks like medicine's best-kept secret just may be out of the bag. Finally. But as the issues become more widely publicized, the momentum is beginning to grow, and certain key issues keep surfacing.

Technologists across the country are seeking answers to questions like: How am I going to keep up with these emerging technologies? When can I finally get some time off of work to spend with my family? Does it make sense for me to have to take care of all this paperwork when I could be spending more time with my patients? How can I get ahead when there are limited options for me to be promoted? How can I get into the PET/CT game when my state's licensure laws are restricting me from practicing this technology?

As the professional organization representing NMTs, the SNMTS is seeking answers to these questions, too. The SNM and SNMTS have initiated various new special committees to identify and address specific workforce issues such as retention, recruitment, and data collection as well as the education, certification, and licensure issues surrounding emerging technologies. The Workforce Task Force, PET/CT Task Force, and the Advanced Practice Task Force are all busy developing programs and relationships that will let us come up with practical responses to these workplaces developments. Several existing committees, such as the Government Relations, Academic Affairs, Continuing Education, Data Analysis, Scientific and Teaching, and Leadership Mentoring Committees, are also focusing on these issues.

It is apparent that the SNMTS alone cannot resolve these issues. Over the past 18 months, I have seen first hand how collaboration with organizations in radiology, health care, the Federal government, and others has been critical to our ability to shape these developing issues to favor the best interests of nuclear medicine technologists.

The SNMTS has formed multiple coalitions and partnerships with various entities and continues to find new partners in solving these "big ticket items." I'd like to list for you a few of the various organizations with whom the SNM and SNMTS are working:

American Society of Radiologic Technologists (ASRT)

American Registry of Radiologic Technologists (ARRT)

Health Professions Network (HPN)

Nuclear Medicine Technology Certification Board (NMTCB)

European Association of Nuclear Medicine (EANM)

Joint Review Committee on Educational Programs in Nuclear Medicine Technology (JRCNMT)

American Healthcare Radiology Administrators (AHRA)

American College of Radiology (ACR)

Radiologic Society of North America (RSNA)

American Society of Nuclear Cardiology (ASNC)

Education and Research Foundation of the SNM (ERF)

Nuclear Medicine Industry Association of North America (NMIA)

Various industry partners

While the issues may seem all encompassing, the opportunities for nuclear medicine technologists have never been brighter. In the 12 years I've been in nuclear medicine, I've never seen such interest or passion from technologists. Everyone is expressing an opinion about the emergence of PET/CT, other new technologies, or the issues that have risen surrounding the current workforce shortage. This renewed passion will drive the profession forward. Sure, some of the old issues and challenges are still around, but this spotlight on new technology and the workforce will generate the momentum needed to fuel action on all our major issues.