

Over the past 18 months, I have become very familiar with many topics, but none as critical as our current workforce issues as they affect both nuclear medicine and all of healthcare. Technologists and managers from across the country frequently identify the current workforce shortage as the number one concern facing our profession.

In the November/December 2003 issue of *Uptake*, I described the evolution of what is known today as a Gateway meeting. This year's meeting, Gateway V, was held in mid-October in Chantilly, VA, near the SNM office in Reston. During this meeting, the Executive Board and various invited guests participated in the development of a plan to address long-term issues facing the workforce in nuclear medicine technology. Individuals representing the NMTCB (Nuclear Medicine Technology Certification Board), ASRT (American Society of Radiologic Technologists), ARRT (American Registry of Radiologic Technologists), ASNC (American Society of Nuclear Cardiology), and JRCNMT (Joint Review Committee on Education in Nuclear Medicine Technology) as well as the chairs of various key SNMTS committees were invited to participate in this process. We were fortunate to bring together leaders from across the country representing nuclear medicine (including PET), nuclear cardiology, imaging services (including PET/CT), industry, education, pediatrics, research, management/administration, and quality improvement. A workforce data collection expert from the Workforce Study Center at the State University of New York at Albany enlightened us on the details of designing a comprehensive mechanism for data collection.

We discussed the impact of the current workforce shortage as well as the projected demand for technologists in the latter part of this decade as the



baby-boomers retire and drive up the need for the services we provide. In looking at the profession, we determined that there are multiple layers to the issues surrounding workforce, and that the SNMTS must partner with others to truly have an impact on these issues. Each participant presented their perspective by answering 4 pre-determined questions. Collectively, we redefined the needs of the profession and determined several broad goals for addressing these needs. Smaller working groups then developed action steps while identifying barriers to achieving these goals. This work was documented and polished and is now known as the SNMTS Workforce Plan.

The following goals were established as part of the SNMTS Workforce Plan and steps are underway to incorporate them into the SNMTS Strategic Plan.

- **Data Collection and Analysis.** To design and implement a system of information to support planning, modeling, and forecasting.
- **Education Model for the Job of the Future.** To establish, modify, and implement educational models (modify curriculum and delivery systems, and implement evaluation mechanisms to assess learning) for

the following four groups: a) students, b) educators, c) technologists, and d) managers.

- **Quality of Students/Graduates/Existing Workforce.** To improve the quality of students, graduates, and the existing workforce. For years, studies and surveys have indicated that managers have been increasingly dissatisfied with the performance of entry-level technologists, implying that the expectation of managers is not aligned with the products of our current educational system. At the same time, multiple competing conditions in the current workforce, such as decreased funding for continuing education and an overburdened workforce, inhibit the evolution of the profession mainly because we can't keep up with the emerging technologies.
- **Outreach.** To increase knowledge and awareness of the nuclear medicine profession by various stakeholders, e.g., potential students, vendors, government, licensing agencies, and other professional associations.
- **Funding.** To seek funding for educational opportunities, schools, and research.
- **Retention and the Aging Workforce.** To recruit and retain a sustainable workforce.

I have only listed the plan's goals here; the actual plan is much more detailed. After spending the weekend going through the process of planning for the educational future of nuclear medicine technologists, one thing is sure—we all need to embrace the changes we are facing and be ready to adapt to the changing environment. While change is scary, there really is no alternative. We need to shape the future and define our own destiny. Now is the time to begin making the changes needed for the future of our profession.