

Career Prospects for Graduating Nuclear Medicine Residents: Survey of Nuclear Medicine Program Directors

Jay A. Harolds, MD^a, Milton J. Guiberteau, MD^b, Darlene F. Metter, MD^c,
M. Elizabeth Oates, MD^d

There has been much consternation in the nuclear medicine (NM) community in recent years regarding the difficulty many NM graduates experience in securing initial employment. A survey designed to determine the extent and root causes behind the paucity of career opportunities was sent to all 2010-2011 NM residency program directors. The results of that survey and its implications for NM trainees and the profession are presented and discussed in this article.

Key Words: Nuclear medicine jobs, job surveys in nuclear medicine, career opportunities in nuclear medicine, employment in nuclear medicine

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INTRODUCTION

At recent national nuclear medicine (NM) and radiology meetings, much concern has been expressed by professional thought leaders, training program faculty, and NM trainees themselves about the dearth of employment opportunities for new graduates of NM residency programs. This issue has been addressed in recent articles published in the peer-reviewed and professional society opinion literature [1-4]. This article examines this critical employment challenge from the perspective of those having the most intimate insights into NM resident training, namely the NM residency program directors (NMPDs).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A survey was designed to elucidate NMPDs' collective experiences and insights into the job prospects for grad-

uates of ACGME-accredited NM residency programs (Fig. 1).

RESULTS

The survey was sent to all 54 NMPDs by e-mail; 41 (76%) responded by the close of the survey on March 24, 2011.

Survey Responses

Question 1. How many ACGME-approved residency positions are allotted to your program? There were a total of 148 ACGME-approved residency positions in the 41 NM programs whose NMPDs responded to the survey; this represents a mean of 3.6 ACGME positions per program.

Question 2. How many residents are currently in your program (2010-2011)? One program having 2 approved slots was excluded from this part of the analysis because of an error by the respondent. For the other 40 programs, there were a total of 130 residents enrolled in the responding programs; those programs had 146 ACGME-approved residency positions. Therefore, the responding programs were approximately 89% filled. According to the ACGME website [5], there were 155 NM residents in training that year; thus, this survey received responses from the program directors representing the majority of residents.

Question 3. How many of your current residents are radiologists? There were a total of 28 residents who were radiologists in training in 16 (39%) of the 41 programs. The number of radiologists in those programs ranged from 1 to 4.

^aDivision of Radiology and Biomedical Imaging, College of Human Medicine, Michigan State University, Grand Rapids, Michigan and Advanced Radiology Services, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

^bDivision of Nuclear Medicine, Baylor College of Medicine, St. Joseph Medical Center, Houston, Texas.

^cDepartment of Radiology, University of Texas at San Antonio Medical Center, San Antonio, Texas.

^dDepartment of Radiology, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky.

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Corresponding author and reprints: Jay A. Harolds, MD, Advanced Radiology Services, PC, 3264 North Evergreen Drive NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49525, e-mail: harolds112@cox.net

41 Responses March 24, 2011, 3:36 PM

1. How many ACGME-approved residency positions are allotted to your program?
2. How many residents are currently in your program (2010-2011)?
3. How many of your current residents are radiologists?
4. How many of your current residents are international medical graduates?
5. In June 2010, how many residents graduated from your program?
6. Of your 2010 graduates, how many are currently:
 - a. employed 50-100% in nuclear medicine
 - b. employed <50% in nuclear medicine
 - c. employed, but not in nuclear medicine
 - d. unemployed
7. In your opinion, are your 2010 nonradiologist graduates competent to correlate, as part of SPECT/CT or PET/CT, anatomic and/or localized pathology as displayed on the CT component of the hybrid study? If "yes," how many of your 2010 graduates are credentialed to so interpret SPECT/CT and PET/CT?
8. As a NMPD, would you participate in a joint/combined residency program with radiology such that graduates would be eligible to certify in diagnostic radiology and nuclear medicine?
9. What is your opinion (from Outstanding to Poor) of the job market for nuclear medicine residency graduates who are:
 - US medical school graduates and not radiologists?
 - International medical graduates and not radiologists?
 - Radiologists?
10. What is your opinion of the morale of your residents regarding the job market? (Free text)

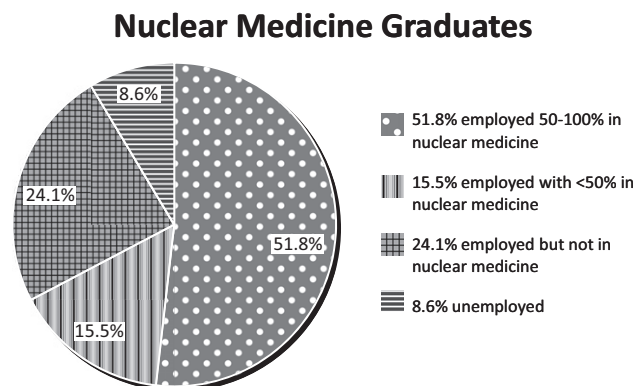
Fig 1. Survey of nuclear medicine residency program directors.

Question 4. How many of your current residents are international medical graduates? A total of 83 of the NM residents were international graduates. Of the 41 NM residency programs, 31 (76%) had at least one international graduate. Of the programs that had international graduates, the number of international graduates per program varied from 1 to 5.

Question 5. In June 2010, how many residents graduated from your program? There were a total of 58 graduates from the responding programs in June 2010. Nine (22%) programs had no graduates. Of the 32 programs that had graduates, the average number of graduates per program was 1.8, ranging from 1 to 5.

Question 6. Of your 2010 graduates, how many are currently employed 50% to 100% in nuclear medicine, employed <50% in nuclear medicine, employed but not in nuclear medicine, or unemployed? Of the 58 graduates, 30 (51.8%) were employed 50% to 100% in nuclear medicine, 9 (about 15.5%) were employed in a job with less than 50% time in nuclear medicine, 14 (about 24.1%) were employed but did not work in nuclear medicine, and 5 (about 8.6%) were unemployed. (Fig. 2) One NM resi-

deny graduate subsequently entered a radiology residency, but the responding NMPD did not assign a category to the amount of nuclear medicine the individual would do during that first year of radiology residency; however, the number of months for a radiology resident who has already com-

**Fig 2.** Employment of nuclear medicine graduates in 2010. (Responses to Question 6.)

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