Another view of IRIYA 2011

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The Radiological Society of North America (RSNA) provides international radiologists and radiology residents the opportunity to attend a special research seminar held in conjunction with the RSNA Scientific Assembly and Annual Meeting at McCormick Place, Chicago, Illinois. The focus of this seminar is to encourage radiologists from outside North America to pursue careers in academic radiology, and is supported by the RSNA.

I was privileged to be one of 16 radiologists from around the world accepted for the IRIYA 2011 programme. McCormick Place is one of the largest conference centres in the world, with around 60 000 delegates attending the 2011 congress, so the orientation and welcome reception by D Tokarski and F Miller for the IRIYA delegates was most helpful. The IRIYA programme directed by Dr J Eng and Dr W Mayo-Smith was very well organised. A detailed programme and relevant reading material were sent to all IRIYA participants well in advance, facilitating more interactive sessions. Some sessions were combined with the Introduction to Academic Radiology Seminar for North American residents, while other sessions were dedicated to IRIYA participants.

Particularly relevant lectures included Opportunities in Translational Research and Quantitative Imaging by Professor K Macura; Research Opportunities in Informatics by Dr N Safdar; Statistics by A Frangos; and Radiology Research: Deductions from the Literature and How They May Be Applied to Your Research by Professor R Hichwa. The RSNA Grant Programs and Education Resources seminar by F Miller, E Pietrzak and S Walter introduced delegates to the many research grants, opportunities and resources offered by the RSNA to international radiologists. During the research seminar, all IRIYA delegates were given the opportunity to present a current research proposal, which was critically evaluated by a panel. I found this particularly useful as my moderator Professor J Blickman and panelists Professor S Voss and Dr W Willinek were experienced and objective.

The IRIYA programme was an excellent opportunity to network and meet international mentors, researchers and colleagues, facilitating opportunities for future collaborative research projects. It was also most inspiring to meet previous attendees of the IRIYA programme and hear of their accomplishments in research internationally, since their attendance.

In addition to the IRIYA programme (where all sessions were compulsory), I was able to attend the early morning and late afternoon refresher and multisession courses. I found the paediatric imaging and breast imaging series to be particularly relevant. The information gained is already being used to update certain protocols – in particular, breast MRI imaging at my institution.

I take this opportunity to thank Professor V Mngomezulu for nominating me for this programme, the RSNA for providing me with this outstanding opportunity, and the Radiological Society of South Africa (RSSA), President Dr C Sperryn and Congress Chairman Professor L J van Rensburg, for facilitating this opportunity through the RSSA's affiliation and collaboration with the RSNA. I also thank Professors V Mngomezulu and S Andronikou and Dr I Nagdee for supporting me with research. As I am currently working on several research projects with radiologists, registrars and clinicians, this programme will help to strengthen research in our institution.

To conclude: the 2011 IRIYA programme was an excellent platform for building a successful career as a South African researcher and academic in diagnostic radiology and collaborating at an international level.

NECSA and NTP donate PET-CT scanner to Tygerberg Hospital

On 25 November 2011, the Western Cape Health Department, NTP Radioisotopes and its parent company, the South African Nuclear Energy Corporation (NECSA), marked the intermediate phase of installing a R15.6 million positron emission tomography - computed tomography (PET-CT) scanner at Tygerberg Hospital.

Mapula Letsoalo, NTP's Executive Director, pointed out that, of the 9 functioning PET-CT scanners in the country, most are in Gauteng Province, with only one in the Western Cape. 'The scanner owned by the Cape PET-CT Centre is currently shared between one private clinic and three state hospitals,' she explained. 'This scenario has caused strain as Tygerberg and Groote Schuur hospitals as well as Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital are only allocated two afternoon sessions per week. The need for an additional PET-CT scanner in the province was imminent as the use of F-18 FDG has grown by 109% in 2009/10 compared to 2008/09 for Tygerberg Hospital alone.'

Western Cape Health Minister Theuns Botha said: 'Western Cape provincial government is so thankful for the PET-CT scanner, which will bring enormous relief to the staff and capacity at Tygerberg Hospital. We have more than 2 000 new oncology patients at Tygerberg each year who depend on our services, as well as thousands more who come for follow-up. Patients from Groote Schuur and Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital will also be scanned at the facility. Our health budget does not allow us to invest in the advanced technology offered by the scanner, and with this generous donation the hospital is now able to offer this service to more than 10 patients per day.'

The tender to provide the PET-CT scanner was awarded to Philips Medical Systems. Professor James Warwick of the Nuclear Medicine Department at Tygerberg Hospital, and project leader, commented: 'The Philips PET-CT system met all our main requirements as a dedicated oncology machine with time-of-flight technology enabling low FDG doses, and its suitability for radiotherapy planning including its large bore and full integration with the existing PACS and radiotherapy planning systems at academic hospitals in the Western Cape. Clinically, this means more accurate detection, better resolution, detection of smaller lesions and faster scanning.'

Positron emission tomography (PET) is a modern medical functional imaging technique used in the management of patients with cancer; it is also used in infection and inflammation, cardiology and neurology. PET provides accurate diagnosis, staging and re-staging in certain cancers, and allows rapid evaluation of the efficacy of therapy. PET has led to changes in treatment options and prevention of unnecessary surgical procedures in a significant number of patients.

Millions of patients throughout the world benefit from nuclear medicine scans and other procedures performed using products supplied by NTP. Letsoalo added that NTP manufactures, among other products, isotopes used to enable diagnostic imaging as well as several used in treating diseases. 'Early detection of most diseases assisted by nuclear medicine scans greatly enhances the possibility of early and accurate diagnosis. This allows prompt and proper treatment and, therefore, a better chance of a saved life.'

The contribution of the Western Cape Department of Health to this PET-CT project is around R14.75 million (R11 million for infrastructure and R3.75 million for equipment accessories). The new PET-CT scanner will be fully functional by the middle of this year.