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Commentary

Is There a Scientist in the House? An Endangered Species: The Neuroradiologist as Clinician-Investigator

Anne G. Osborn[1] and Dieter Schellinger[2]

Dr. Taveras's fascinating historical review and revealing commentary [1] on the development of neuroradiology subspecialty training in North America points out the key role of the National Institute of Neurological Diseases and Stroke (NINDS) (in earlier years, blindness and communicative disorders were included also) in supporting the development of neuroradiology as a specialized discipline. The resounding success of those early training efforts was instrumental in both the establishment and the subsequent growth of our subspecialty. Formal accreditation of neuroradiology training programs is in progress, with subspecialty certification of individuals not far behind. Although we should feel justifiable pride in our success as clinicians, we should feel chagrined at the near demise of the neuroradiologist as clinician-investigator. NINDS, the most likely source of neuroradiology-related research grants, receives fewer grant applications from neuroradiologists than from any other neuroscience discipline [2].

The frequently held notion that our trainees have few—if any—opportunities for research experience or even exposure is only partially correct. The NINDS offers an Institutional Research Training Program and also a Clinical Investigator Development Award, which help develop research skills. On July 1, 1991, the newly founded Diagnostic Radiology Research Program (DRRP) at NIH will open its doors to six radiology research fellows who will undergo a 2-year training program in basic and clinical radiology research. The DRRP is an intramural operation with its own director and with a line-item operational budget of approximately $2 million.

There are efforts on the part of the American Society of Neuroradiology (ASNR) that provide a modest beginning in furthering the basic-science underpinning of our specialty: the ASNR Basic Science Fellowships and the Annual Basic Science Course are good but limited programs. After nearly a decade, we again have a neuroradiologist sitting on the NINDS Advisory Council. However, these promising signs portend nothing unless we develop our investigative expertise as diligently and as relentlessly as we have pursued our clinical interests.

We have had a plea [2] directed at us specifically by Murray Goldstein, Director of NINDS. We also have a wonderful focus for the 1990s, officially designated the Decade of the Brain. We have, therefore, unique and timely opportunities for progress [3]. There are positions waiting to be filled (e.g., director of the Diagnostic Imaging Research Program at the National Institutes of Health). There are grants waiting to be awarded (funding, having reached its nadir at NINDS a year or two ago, is once again improving). There are bright, eager young minds waiting to be trained. And there are new frontiers waiting to be probed.

Neuroradiology and the ASNR are a true clinical success story. Now, let us, individually and collectively, reach for the next higher level, devoting time and effort as well as energy

This article is a commentary on the preceding article by Taveras.

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and resources to developing the scientific underpinnings of neuroradiology. Is there a scientist in the neuroradiologic house? By the century's turn, let the answer come from many voices and institutions: a resounding Yes! (Note: Persons interested in the position at the National Institutes of Health should submit a curriculum vitae and bibliography to Dr. Dinah Singer, Office of Intramural Affairs, Bldg. 1, Rm. 140, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD 20892.)

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