Status of Nuclear Medicine in Korea

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The first clinical use of radioisotope in Korea started in June 1959, when a patient with hyperthyroidism was treated with $^{131}$I. However the real active application of radioisotope in clinical medicine came to be possible when the Radioisotope Clinic was opened at the Seoul National University Hospital in April 1960. Subsequently the four provincial national university hospitals were granted various kinds of nuclear medicine equipments through the United States Atomic Energy Commission. With the economic growth of Korea, the number of the nuclear medicine laboratories has steadily been rising, having reached a total of 89, as of 1986. Out of these hospitals, the gamma camera is operational in 65 hospitals, and the radioimmunoassay in 59 hospitals. Moreover a medical cyclotron was installed in Korea last year.

After 1962, Korean Atomic Energy Research Institute began to produce radioisotopes, and almost all of radiopharmaceuticals and kits for thyroid radioimmunoassay are now produced and marketed in Korea. The amount of radioisotopes consumed in Korea for the diagnostic purpose reached 724 Ci in 1984 from 5 Ci in 1962, 32 Ci in 1970 and 114 Ci in 1980.

The Korean Society of Nuclear Medicine was founded in 1961, which is the second oldest such society in Asia. The Korean Society issued its magazine semiannually since 1967. In 1984 the 3rd Asia-Oceania Congress of Nuclear Medicine was successfully held in Korea with 700 scholars attended.

But there remain several problems to be solved; that is, the want of the financial support, some radiopharmaceuticals which are not yet produced in Korea, the competition with the other imaging methods, and the lack of the education of nuclear medicine for the undergraduate or the post-graduate.

However, we are looking forward to seeing the further accelerative advancement of Korean nuclear medicine including the more investments to the equipment and the production of radiopharmaceuticals and the formation of Korean board of nuclear medicine.