



# Growing Global Ties

IRAQI RADIOLOGISTS TAKE HOME NEW INSIGHTS AND KNOWLEDGE THROUGH ACR/RSNA OBSERVERSHIP PROGRAM.

By Alyssa Martino

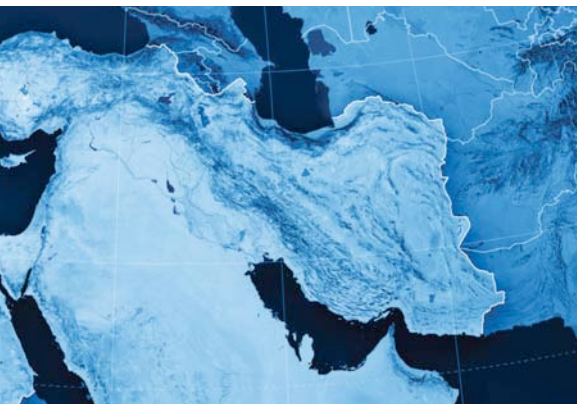
**W**ar permeates all aspects of society — from economic stability to citizens' access to food, water, and shelter. It's no surprise that health care is often jeopardized, as well.

In Iraq, the practice of medicine has been at risk since the onset of war in 2003. "The situation is probably even worse for radiologists because of the technology we need to do our jobs," says N. Reed Dunnick, M.D., FACR, chair of the radiology department at the University of Michigan Health System in Ann Arbor, Mich., where he supervised the two Iraqi observers to date. But because of the ACR/RSNA Iraqi-Observership program, the radiology community in Iraq is not alone.

## In Dire Need

Abdul Hadi Al Khalili, M.D., cultural attaché to the Iraqi Embassy in Washington, D.C., stresses that the situation in Iraq is very serious for those in health care. “Our senior educators and most experienced radiologists have fled, and owners of private clinics have been targeted,” Khalili says. “Radiology machines may be found all over Baghdad but often do not work because of a lack of electricity and operators, as well as the hardships of everyday life.”

Imaging technologies were frozen at the onset of war, and, as a result, Iraq is approximately 10 to 15 years behind in imaging advances. Although Iraqi radiologists receive training similar to that provided to residents in the United States, they lack some of the most commonly used imaging equipment. Radiologists have said the situation is so dire that they have to buy X-ray film on the black market.



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Consequently, “there has been a huge flight of anyone in academic circles — particularly acute in the physician community,” says Brad Short, senior director of member services for the ACR. “Many left Baghdad, or even the country. Clearly, war led to a lack of resources, but there has also been a brain drain.”

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“Big companies don’t want to send their engineers and staff into an insecure environment,” explains Ahmad Al-Shamssie, M.D., former chair of the radiology department at Baghdad Teaching Hospital. He suffered an assassination attempt and has lost several close friends — also practicing radiologists — to militant attacks.

## Solution Set in Motion

Since leaving his position in 2006 as chair of the University of Baghdad’s department of neurosurgery, Khalili has devoted his life to fixing the health-care system in Iraq. “Being a physician myself, I feel compelled to help in any way I can,” he says.

In 2004, Khalili approached Harvey L. Neiman M.D., FACR, CEO of the College, about instituting an observership. After discussing the idea, they decided to introduce a program in 2006 through which the ACR would host Iraqi radiologists for six-week visits to a U.S. radiology teaching center. Short organized and continues to manage the program. The ACR partnered with the RSNA in 2008 to expand the number of participants and scope of the program.

The trips are funded by a grant from the Agfa Corp. and through money provided through the RSNA Research and Education Foundation. To cut expenses, some of the housing is provided with an Iraqi-American family. So far, two radiologists have participated in the program in 2007 and later in 2010 (due to visa issues), both of whom were supervised by Dunnick and other faculty at the University of Michigan.

Before the program began, Al-Shamssie was the first Iraqi radiologist hosted in the U.S. He then partnered with his supervisor, William E. Shiels II, DO, chair of the department of radiology at Nationwide Children’s Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, to rebuild radiology in Iraq during Shiels’

2004 visit to Baghdad with the Iraqi Medical Alliance. Now Al-Shamssie helps choose observership participants along with leadership from the ACR Foundation’s International Outreach Committee and the RSNA Committee on International Relations and Education.

He says the next two Iraqi observers are scheduled to arrive in October 2010 and will spend two weeks at the RSNA Annual Meeting and taking an ACR Education Center course with the balance (four weeks) at a U.S. radiology training program. Participants will receive valuable knowledge and insight, meet other radiologists, and gain CME credits.

## Taking It All in

Dunnick feels strongly about the positive impact the observership program will have on Iraq. “By offering these educational experiences to Iraqi radiologists, they’re better able to appreciate the evolution of our field, keep up with their areas of interests, and see how a modern academic radiology practice functions,” he says.

In the past, Dunnick customized an experience for each participant that was tied to their professional goals. “Dr. [Haidar Abdulameer] Ghayad was interested in image-guided interventional procedures, so he spent his time primarily with the interventionalists to see the many possibilities of image guidance that no longer require conventional surgery,” he says.

“This is particularly important for a country like Iraq because if surgery is not needed, then a patient won’t have to be hospitalized,” he adds. With hospital beds in demand throughout the country, this is a major selling point for the subspecialty.

During his March 2010 observership, Ghayad noted several differences between the United States and Iraq in practicing radiology, including the technology. “What’s missing [in Iraq] is mostly new technologies like diffusion MRI, PET, CT,



Courtesy Ahmad Al-Shamssie

From left, Brad Short, ACR's senior director of member services; Abdul Hadi Al Khalili, M.D.; Harvey L. Neiman, M.D., FACR; and Ahmad Al-Shamssie, M.D., helped organize and implement the ACR/RSNA Iraqi-Observership program.

intervention in general — mainly neuro-vascular and vascular interventions — and nuclear medicine updates,” he says. Ghayad also was able to use a PACS, which is currently unavailable in Iraq.

Sulafa Jerew, M.D., who completed the first ACR observership in 2007, also was eager to use PACS. “I enjoyed the organized, efficient, and modern setting,” she says of the teaching center in Ann Arbor.

“Dr. Jerew spent three weeks observing and learning to see how we do patient care,” Dunnick says. “It’s a wonderful opportunity, in terms of the use of the equipment, protocoling, seeing the actual images, and even improving diagnostic skills.”

The Iraqi radiologists take these experiences home. “In addition to giving the individuals a chance to catch up, it is really something they can transport to Iraq and, potentially implement in a new program that can better serve the populace in the future,” Short says. “Iraqis are getting exposure to technologies and techniques that Baghdad could possibly see in the near term.”

### Cultivating Partnership

Plans to broaden the observerships are under way. “We hope this project

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will expand to have more doctors come over, and that it will also help strengthen relations among the ACR, RSNA, and Iraqi radiologists,” Khalili says.

“We believe that in the future there will be exchange visits between the ACR and Iraq, when things are approved as safe,” he adds. “What we can do now is to expose Iraqi radiologists to ACR teaching materials.” This effort has already begun; the ACR sent 10 complete sets of the ACR Learning File® CDs to teaching facilities in Iraq in 2006.

Those involved with the observership also have goals for linking the two cultures. “Education and rebuilding communication between Iraq and U.S.

radiologists is crucial,” Al-Shamssie asserts. “In addition to exposing participants to the newest education methods and newest modalities of technology, there is a cultural benefit to this program.”

Khalili agrees: “We are ready to do anything to promote this linkage between Iraq and the United States, which will be a model of strengthening not only scientific relations but also cultural and individual ties.”

If you are interested in hosting an Iraqi radiologist at your teaching facility or have general questions about the program, please contact Short at 800-227-5463, ext. 4975, or [bshort@acr-arrs.org](mailto:bshort@acr-arrs.org), or contact Khalili at [iraq\\_cultural\\_attache@yahoo.com](mailto:iraq_cultural_attache@yahoo.com). //