

## TRIAGE AND NUCLEAR MEDICINE

During the early 1950's, the experts in Atomic Energy requested some of the VA Hospitals to hold special lectures for the medical and allied-field personnel concerning the handling of casualties after a nuclear accident or an attack (discussing how the patients entering the hospitals would be handled according to priorities). They decided that the Chief of Surgery (Oscar Serlin), a plastic surgeon (Alma Marani) and somebody with radiation expertise would explain the fundamentals of radiation hazards. José, as Acting Chief of the Radioisotope Unit, was one of the three selected to present in the discussion.

Dr. Serlin explained the concept of triage, how to conserve the resources of the hospital, and how these resources would be used to handle those victims most likely to derive maximum benefit and who had the best chances of survival. Dr. Marani explained the advances in plastic surgery and how even badly burned patients could be saved. José explained how radiation affects tissues, and how the symptoms of mild and severe radiation differ. The presentations were covered by the local newspapers: *The Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, etc. Among those attending were many physicians and heads from a large number of small hospitals throughout Pennsylvania.

At the end of the talks, a group of three physicians from an upstate hospital approached José and asked whether he could come to their hospital to discuss radiation. They did not want surgeons nor any of the other physicians. They gave José a date for his appearance. They told him that they would get reservations for him to stay near their hospital. José explained that he would need a projector for his talk, and they assured him that they could borrow one.

Then José asked a question: who would pay for the transportation to their hospital? The physicians glared at José, replying that they, of course, expected the VA to take care of this. José pointed out that he needed permission to leave the hospital and travel to another city, and he also knew that there were no funds available at the hospital to permit anyone there to travel elsewhere. He suggested that the physicians go talk to the Director of the VA Hospital to see if something could be worked out. Upon hearing this, the three of them proceeded to admonish José in the strongest terms for having wasted their time and for having participated in the presentation since, they claimed, José was a person with no authority. As they left the room, José could overhear mild curses following as they strode angrily away. They never went to see the Director, nor did José ever hear from them again. When José later spoke to the Director (Dr. Swanson) about the incident, he was admonished for having discussed matters that the Director considered to belong administratively under his own jurisdiction!