

MICHEL KOOLE EANM Scientific Liaison Officer

Since January 2023, Michel Koole has served as the EANM Scientific Liaison Officer, contributing as a member of the EANM Board. In this role, he has been pivotal in representing the EANM and highlighting the needs of the Nuclear Medicine community to EU institutions. His term is set to conclude in December 2024, meaning that his position will soon need to be filled. Read his interview to gain a deeper understanding of his commitment to the field and the responsibilities of the EANM Scientific Liaison Officer.



1. Nuclear Medicine is rapidly advancing and getting increasing interest within the medical community. Could you walk us through your journey into this unique field?

I pursued my studies in Ghent, a lovely city in Belgium that I highly recommend visiting. Initially, I studied Physics, but my interests gradually shifted towards Medical Physics, a discipline that felt more relevant and engaging due to its link with patient care.

During my studies, I had to choose between three main areas: Radiology, Nuclear Medicine, and Radiotherapy. I opted for Nuclear Medicine and started an internship at the Nuclear Medicine department of Ghent University Hospital. There, I was supervised by Rudi Dierckx, who is currently the EANM President. I eventually graduated with a master's degree in Physics and trained as a certified medical radiation physicist. My thesis in Nuclear Medicine was well received, and I continued with a PhD at Ghent University, which I finished in 2002. I further pursued academia with a post-doc position.

However, after becoming a father, I had to reconsider my career path. I left my post-doc position and decided to move to the industry, where I developed medical image analysis software. Despite the benefits, I eventually missed the hospital environment. In 2007, I decided to join the Nuclear Medicine department of UZ Leuven in Gasthuisberg as a medical physicist, focusing on PET data analysis for contract research studies. Later, I became a research expert in quantitative molecular imaging.

By mid-2012, at the age of 40, I wanted to break out of my comfort zone and gain new experiences. In addition, commuting from Ghent to Leuven daily became tiring, so I moved with my family to the Netherlands to work with Rudi Dierckx at the University Medical Center Groningen. Although our quality of life was great, our parents were aging, and we considered returning to Belgium to be closer to family.

At that point, I applied for an academic position at KU Leuven and started as an associate professor in October 2014. I worked closely with Koen Van Laere, with whom I had already collaborated during my PhD at Ghent University. Since then, I have been doing research on quantitative molecular imaging. I have been focusing on therapeutic radiopharmaceuticals and the planning and dosimetry of targeted radionuclide therapies.

2. Since its establishment in 1985, the EANM has been dedicated to expanding the reach and enhancing the visibility of Nuclear Medicine worldwide. What convinced you to invest your time in its mission?

I first heard of the EANM when submitting my first research abstract to the EANM Annual Congress in Glasgow in 1997. Even back then, the EANM was already a landmark in the field, and PhD students were encouraged to participate and present their research at the Congress. It was a great opportunity to meet peers and experts. Since then, I have attended almost every EANM Annual Congress.

Later, I joined the EANM Physics Committee and enjoyed working with colleague experts on guidance documents and policy-making aspects. This experience broadened my knowledge, kept me informed of the latest developments, and allowed me to contribute to scientific sessions at the Congress.

After discussions with Rudi Dierckx, Felix Mottaghy, and Michael Lassman, I decided to apply to join the EANM Board as Scientific Liaison Officer. At that point, I was still a bit hesitant to represent the entire field of Medical Physics in Nuclear Medicine. However, thanks to a smooth handover by Michael and the support of the Executive Office, I quickly grew into the job. I also realised that being a Board member is incredibly rewarding, as it has enabled me to extend my network and work with diverse experts on critical topics. The current EANM Board's positive vibe and smooth interactions with the Office have also been highly motivating. However, being a Board member does require a significant time investment, and it is something to consider carefully before applying.

3. In your role as EANM Scientific Liaison Officer, you have played a key part in elevating Nuclear Medicine within scientific societies, particularly at the EU level. Could you please tell us more about your recent activities?

Elected as Scientific Liaison Officer in 2022, I have truly enjoyed this multidisciplinary role, representing the EANM towards EU institutions, stakeholders, and other associations. I am working closely with the EANM Policy & Regulatory Affairs Council (PRAC) and the Executive Office's EU Affairs team.

We are currently engaged in securing the supply of radioisotopes, and we participate regularly in discussions with the European Commission, its Directorate-General for Energy (DG ENER), and industry partners to represent the Nuclear Medicine community and the interests of our patients. We are also steering the revision of the EU Pharmaceutical Legislation to ensure it considers Nuclear Medicine's unique needs and maintains a high level of patient care. Although our proposed amendments have not been integrated yet, we are not giving up and are pushing for them to be included in the latest revision.

We are also advocating for the inclusion of radionuclides in the European Medicines Agency (EMA)'s first Union list of critical medicines, emphasising Nuclear Medicine's importance for patient care. Workforce issues and training initiatives are also high on our EU agenda. Our ongoing challenge is to seek EU funding to support our initiatives related to this matter, and to encourage the EANM's partner organisations to join forces.

4. Beyond the Blouse: Deep down, what is your real motivation for coming to Vienna regularly? And in an alternate universe where you are not a Nuclear Medicine expert, what career path would intrigue you the most?

I primarily enjoy coming to Vienna to connect with the people. By people, I mean the other Board members, the EANM volunteers, and the Executive Office staff. It is always a pleasure to see them in person. I also appreciate the international environment and Vienna's beautiful scenery, though I often lack time for sightseeing.

In another life, I would have loved to become a pilot, but as you can see, my career path led me in a different direction!

5. What's next? After several years of dedicated service as an EANM Committee member and Board member, what are your plans regarding your involvement in the EANM?

I recently announced my desire to extend my term as Scientific Liaison Officer. These past two years have been exciting, and I have truly enjoyed collaborating with the EANM Board and the EANM Executive Office. Knowing that I could continue working with them has been a strong source of motivation. I would therefore be happy to have two more years to continue my mission.

I already know what my top priorities for these two years will be. With EU institutions preparing for the upcoming legislative term, we must engage with new policymakers to increase awareness of Nuclear Medicine's specific needs. We also need to ensure that legislative dossiers are appropriately followed up. Since I am based in Leuven, close to Brussels, it is quite easy for me to support these actions.

Additionally, I would like to help translate the results from our past and future EU projects and tenders into actionable priorities. For instance, I look forward to further working on the radioprotection recommendations defined through the SIMPLERAD project, as well as topics related to the Nuclear Medicine workforce shortage, training and education.

With the support of physicians, I would also like to continue advocating for medical physicists within the field of Nuclear Medicine. We must foster collaboration among the different specialties within our field to maximise Nuclear Medicine's clinical potential.