

SDMS News Wave is published to inform SDMS members of meetings, events and policies as well as trends and issues in the sonography profession. Comments, questions or concerns about the articles appearing in SDMS News Wave, should be directed to newswave@sdms.org.

The Value of Credentials

by Beth Orenstein



Joy Guthrie, DHSc,
RDMS, RDCS, RVT,
ROUB

Anyone who knows Joy Guthrie, DHSc, RDMS, RDCS, RVT, ROUB, Vice President of the SDMS Board, would not be surprised to learn that she is one of only two people in the world to hold 10 certifications from the American Registry for Diagnostic Sonography (ARDMS.)

Her desire to earn every one of the possible credentials is typical of the kind of dedicated professional she is.

"It does take a certain type of personality to do all that," she admits. "But I put a lot of integrity in what I do, and so each one has been very important to me. I know I sound like a Hallmark card when I say this, but I put the needs of the patients first, and I think my having all those credentials, proving that I have met the national standard in all areas, is what our patients deserve every day."

It took Guthrie 16 years to earn all her credentials. "I got my first one in 1988 and the last one in 2004," says Guthrie, who did not stop there. She has since earned a doctorate in health science.



Coincidentally, the year Guthrie completed her last certification, ARDMS transferred the ROUB ophthalmology sonography exam to the Joint Commission of Allied Health Professionals and Ophthalmology (JCAHPO), and no longer offers it. Also, the ARDMS has since added the physicians' vascular interpretation (RPVI) credential for physicians, so under the current ARDMS structure, no one has all of its credentials and exams.

"If you don't count RPVI, however, then 12 people have three credentials and all registry exams," says Dale Cyr, CEO of the ARDMS. That leaves only two sonographers, Guthrie and Michael Scott Montgomery of Bellevue, Washington, who have the distinction of having earned 10 ARDMS credentials.

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Career choices motivated her

Sonography was not Guthrie's initial career choice. Originally from Texas, but raised in California, Guthrie had studied to be a medical assistant. The conclusion of her medical assistant training required that she work for a physician for free for a month. Guthrie worked with an obstetrician, "and as diligently as I could," she recalls. But when her month was up and she asked him for a job, his reaction was surprising: No. "He said I would never be satisfied as a medical assistant," she says.

He recommended that she go back to school to study imaging instead, which she did, earning an associate's degree from Merced College and her X-ray license. "But as soon as I saw sonography, I thought it was the best thing in the world and I knew that he had been right," says Guthrie, who also has a bachelor's degree in vascular ultrasound from the Oregon Institute of Technology.

Guthrie was motivated to pursue her ARDMS credentials by her job. She lived in a small, rural area in central California and was working at a small community hospital. "I was the only sonographer probably within an hour," she says. "I was performing 70 percent of the available types of modalities at that time – general, vascular, and echo."

Guthrie viewed being the only sonographer in town as an enormous responsibility. "The standard of excellence was to have certification, and so I felt the need to be certified in every type of ultrasound I performed. I felt that if you met a national standard your patients would be well served."

At the time, the ARDMS only offered registry exams once a year. So each year, Guthrie would select a modality and dedicate an entire year of studying to that particular modality after which she would sit for the registry exam. "I did one a year from the late 1980s to the early 1990s," she says.

Guthrie's pursuit required personal sacrifices

In 1994, Guthrie started doing pediatric echo for Children's Hospital Central California in Madera. A few years later, she moved to a full-time position at Children's Hospital, where she is now the lead sonographer. Guthrie is also program director for the Merced College Diagnostic Medical Sonography Program.

When she moved to Children's Hospital, it opened a whole avenue of specialties – pediatric echo, fetal echo, neurosonography, etc. – that she hadn't

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experienced in her "adult" jobs. "So once again, I felt the need to earn my credentials in more areas," she says.

Guthrie was busy raising a family – she has three children, now in their 20s – and working full-time and teaching at Merced while earning her credentials. Taking courses on campuses and through distance education required that she be very, very disciplined. "I manage my time in 15-minute increments," she says with a laugh. "And, yes, I made personal sacrifices along the way."

After earning all her credentials and her degree in motherhood, Guthrie decided she needed a doctorate in health science, which she completed in 2006. As an educator, she felt it was a requirement of her position just as she did earning her sonography credentials was of her clinical work. "If I was going to teach at a college and be a college professor, I felt I should meet the standard," she says.

Having the professional credentials does put Guthrie in a position of being a resource for others and she enjoys that position immensely. "If you put enough hours into studying over a span of 20 years, you're going to be able to answer most questions, and, if you can't, you're going to know where the answer is," Guthrie says. "I believe one of the benefits of working to obtain this knowledge is that you can share it with others."

Others agree credentials worth pursuing

Other sonographers who recently earned additional credentials could not agree more.

Ann Polin, MSR, RDMS, RVT, had been in the field for more than 20 years and had earned her RDMS at the beginning of her career. Later in her career, she decided to add breast, fetal echo and RVT to her

resume and so she studied for the exams and passed with flying colors.

Like Guthrie, Polin hadn't planned on becoming a sonographer. She earned her undergraduate degrees in biology and secondary education. Unfortunately, when she graduated there weren't any teaching jobs. She settled for work as a substitute teacher and didn't care for it.

Knowing she really wanted to be in medicine, she took a job as a phlebotomist at the University of Washington, in the late 1970s. By the early 1980s, everyone was talking about a new field, sonography, and how exciting it would be. Polin investigated opportunities based on the advice of her mentors and decided to attend Bellevue Community College in Bellevue, Washington, where she earned an associate's degree in ultrasound and met Joan Baker, MSR, RDMS, RDCS, FSDMS, who was director of the program at the time.

Polin worked for a number of years as a sonographer at the local hospital in different departments. Then Baker asked her to come back to Bellevue as the clinical coordinator of its diagnostic medical ultrasound program. "We worked together for 11 or 12 years," Polin says, "Joan as director and me as clinical coordinator and then we switched and Joan was clinical coordinator and I was director."

During that time, Polin decided to return to school once again and earn her master's degree in radiologic science education. She participated in a distance education program offered by Midwestern State University in Texas, which required campus residency at the beginning and the end of the program.

In 2005, Polin left Bellevue – Baker had left earlier as well – and returned to clinical practice. For the last three years, Polin has been working at Virginia Mason Medical Center in Seattle, a 336-bed acute-care facility. Polin says her job is quite challenging as Virginia Mason is a very large teaching hospital with 4,800 employees and a substantial number of medical students. Patients come from as far as Alaska and Hawaii and all over the West.

Even when she was in education, Polin kept scanning to keep her skills fresh. "I would take call on weekends or over summer breaks or between quarters, so it was an easy transition for me to go back full-time to the clinical world," she says. The only catch was that Virginia Mason sonographers are required to do vascular as well as general ultrasound and Polin had never done vascular ultrasound before. "I was certified in abdomen and OB, but I had never

“I just wanted to have the additional knowledge. It wasn't a requirement of any job, but I felt it would make me a better sonographer and a better educator.”

done vascular at any of the places I worked," she says. "I had taken vascular courses as part of my education but that was quite a few years ago."

While at Bellevue, Polin had decided to become certified in breast ultrasound because the community college was starting a breast program, "and I thought it was important that I have it," she says. Similarly, she felt that it was important that she be credentialed in vascular when she started working at Virginia Mason.

Was it harder preparing for the additional registry exams as an adult with a career than as a student? Yes and no, Polin says. "It was harder from the standpoint of trying to make time to study because now my life was more complicated. Everyone's life has become more complicated. You have family and jobs and homes to take care of and other responsibilities to deal with. To make time to study requires a lot of juggling and prioritizing."

On the other hand, she says, "when I was younger and in school, the only other thing I had to do other than study was play and it was easy to get distracted back then and not prioritize your studying. As an adult when I needed to make time to study, I was more focused, more motivated and having already had quite a bit of experience scanning, I could relate certain principles and certain scanning techniques and certain basic knowledge to the questions on the exam. I think that part made it easier."

Originally, Polin says, she took the exams for herself. "I just wanted to have the additional knowledge. It wasn't a requirement of any job, but I felt it would make me a better sonographer and a better educator." Later, when she changed jobs, the hospital required that she get her certification in vascular. She would have done it anyway, even if it weren't a requirement of the job, because like Guthrie, she

believes in doing the best she can for her patients and having the credentials is one way of assuring them that she is.

Certification makes newbie more confident

Many of those just entering the profession are as adamant about the need to earn their national certifications as those who have been in the field for years.

Lindsey Gall, RDMS, who graduated from Seattle University in September 2007, is a good example. She had been torn between a career in nursing and sonography, but decided on sonography after some job shadowing.

Her program required that she do two six-month internships and she chose to do her first at Group Health Cooperative in Seattle and her second at Brigham and Women's Hospital, a teaching affiliate of Harvard University, in Boston. The two internships exposed her to the different specialties – general, OB, abdomen and vascular. "At Brigham Women's I had the opportunity to work in the high risk OB unit," Gall says.

Having graduated, Gall is employed as a sonographer by Virginia Mason Medical Center. She took the ARDMS general physics exam in May, the OB exam in June, and the abdomen in July, and passed all three. After taking time off from studying to get married, Gall

intends to study and sit for her breast and vascular certifications as well.

"Virginia Mason is a diverse hospital and we do many different types of exams here," she says. "I really like that a lot, that is one of the many reasons I was drawn to Virginia Mason." But she also believes that because of the diversity it is important for her to be certified in the different areas where she practices.

Gall knows no law requires her to be certified to work a sonographer. But her goal was to work for a major hospital, and they typically require their sonographers to be certified or to get their certification within a certain time of their starting work.

But, she says, she really did it for herself. "The benefit for me is knowing that I'm competent to perform the sonograms that I do."

Studying for the exams was intense, she says. She was admittedly a little nervous about the physics portion of the test and it was somewhat grueling, she says. But having gone to an accredited program, she was confident she was well prepared.

Having taken the exams after working for a few months helped as well, she says. "When you see it every day, when you have hands on experience with it, the knowledge comes naturally."

Beth W. Orenstein is a writer for SDMS.



SDMS News Wave is archived online at:
<http://www.sdms.org/members/NewsWave.asp>

Private Pay Sector Expands Quality Control Measures

“In January 2007, UnitedHealth Group announced a new, nationwide quality improvement initiative through its ‘UnitedHealthcare Imaging Accreditation Program,’ that would require accreditation of providers of several imaging services, including echocardiography, as a condition of eligibility for reimbursement,” reports **Sergio Khomyak**, MBA, RDMS, RVT, Chair, SDMS Government Relations Committee. “While UnitedHealthcare was not the first insurer to establish these requirements, it is certainly the largest.”

https://www.unitedhealthcareonline.com/ccmcontent/ProviderII/UHC/en-US/Assets/ProviderStaticFiles/ProviderStaticFilesPdf/Clinician%20Resources/Imaging%20Accreditation/Accreditation_PressRelease_011107.pdf

Other private pay insurers that have initiated similar programs are:

- Anthem Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio
- Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Kansas City
- Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Tennessee
- Highmark Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Pennsylvania

It seems the Federal Government is following suit. This year, Congress requested that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on Medicare Part B imaging services’ “rapid spending growth.” In a June 2008 report, the GAO found that from 2000 through 2006, Medicare spending for imaging services paid for under the physician fee schedule more than doubled to almost \$14 billion. Spending on ‘advanced diagnostic imaging services,’ such as CT scans, MRIs, and nuclear medicine, grew faster than other imaging services, including sonography and X-ray.

<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d08452.pdf>

Mirroring the private pay sectors’ accreditation requirement as a condition of eligibility for reimbursement, and in an effort to reduce Medicare costs, Congress enacted the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008 (MIPPA), in July 2008. For the first time, Medicare established a defined two-tier payment system for ‘advanced diagnostic imaging services’ (defined as CT, MRIs, NucMed, and PET scans) and ‘standard’ services

(defined as sonography, X-ray and fluoroscopy) which were excluded from the quality control standard. The quality control standard required within the Medicare bill for these ‘advanced diagnostic imaging services’ was accreditation.


“In order to receive Medicare payment for the technical component of imaging services, providers must be (lab) accredited by January 1, 2012. As a result, the private pay sector is aligning their reimbursement requirements with the Medicare timeline,” excerpt from the United Healthcare online website on Imaging Accreditation.

https://www.unitedhealthcareonline.com/ccmcontent/ProviderII/UHC/en-US/Assets/ProviderStaticFiles/ProviderStaticFilesPdf/Clinician%20Resources/Imaging%20Accreditation/Accred_FAQs.pdf

So how might this affect the sonography profession?

“Using accreditation as the only imaging quality control standard is problematic due to the fact that the two largest accrediting bodies for vascular and echocardiography services, ICAVL (Intersocietal Commission for the Accreditation of Vascular Laboratories) and ICAEL (Intersocietal Commission for the Accreditation of Echocardiography), do not require staff sonographer certification,” Khomyak continues. “In fact, only the ‘technical director’ of ICAVL and ICAEL labs/facilities is required to be certified.”

What if the imaging labs cannot meet the standards set by the accrediting bodies, or they do not have the resources available to complete the accreditation process? If this scenario materializes, it could lead to more imaging services performed in hospital settings, which do not currently have certification standards set by the government or the private pay sector.

The SDMS appreciates that the private pay sector has set the stage for national accreditation and encourages them to expand their effort by requiring not only ‘advanced diagnostic imaging’ labs/facilities be accredited, but also that **all** sonographic examinations be performed by certified sonographers who meet minimum certification standards. 

How Vanderbilt University Medical Center School of DMS Celebrates Medical Ultrasound Awareness Month

By: Jill Herzog, BS, RT(R), RDMS, RVT (Director, VUMC School of DMS; At-Large Director, SDMS Board of Directors)



Jill Herzog, BS,
RT(R), RDMS, RVT

At Vanderbilt University Medical Center (VUMC) School of DMS, we celebrate Medical Ultrasound Awareness Month by cooking breakfast one morning for all the staff in the department. VUMC School of DMS's Supervisors of Diagnostic Sonography (Phillip Williams, RDMS, RVT and Marilyn Davis, RDMS) along with myself

do the cooking. As the staff come in at their various start times, they can begin their day with a hot breakfast. Due to popular demand, it has evolved into a Waffle Fest!

Phil is an EXCELLENT waffle chef, and Marilyn cooks the BEST eggs you have ever tasted. I get to bring the 'toppings' for the waffles because everyone knows I cannot cook.

In fact, news of Chef Phil's culinary skills leaked out, and now he cooks waffles one morning for the Radiology Department during National Radiologic Technology Week every November.

In addition to breakfast, we play various games throughout the month. However, due to staggered schedules and busy workloads, it is difficult to coordinate many activities where everyone can participate together. That is why the 'Waffle Fest' breakfast works so well, everyone has an opportunity to participate.

SDMS offers a full line of MUAM products featuring this year's *Sonography - sound it out!* design. Check them out at <http://www.sdms.org/pdf/catalog.pdf>

The free SDMS Medical Ultrasound Awareness Month promotion kit includes a fact sheet, samples of a press and news releases, letter to the government official, official proclamation, suggestions on how to plan your activity and more. You can find the promotion kit at:

<http://www.sdms.org/resources/muam/MUAMkit.pdf>

Medical Ultrasound Awareness Month is a joint effort of the American Institute of Ultrasound in Medicine (AIUM), American Registry for Diagnostic Medical Sonography (ARDMS), American Society of Echocardiography (ASE), Cardiovascular Credentialing International (CCI), Society of Diagnostic Medical Sonography (SDMS), and Society for Vascular Ultrasound (SVU).





Register to Vote!

This is an historical Presidential Election. Be a part of history and vote on November 4, 2008.

Not registered to vote yet? There's still time, at least till October 3, 2008.

Registration information, by state, is available at <http://www.vote411.org/bystate.php>



SDMS Member Alumni - 25 Years

The Society of Diagnostic Medical Sonography would like to thank its most loyal members. Listed on the SDMS web site are more than 700 members that have been active members of SDMS for 25 years or more. Several have been members since 1971!

Congratulations...and THANKS!

You can view the entire list at:
<http://www.sdms.org/about/member25.asp>

SDMS Product Spotlight


Faded Denim Sale

Show your sonography pride even while working in the garden or running errands. We have quality denim shirts that are starting to experience uneven fading.

For a limited time only, you can purchase your very own Safe & Sound denim shirt for just \$5 if you are an SDMS member and \$7 for non-members. Call 1-800-229-9506 now to place your order, or to view other sonography pride products, go to <http://www.sdms.org/pdf/catalog.pdf>.

Credit card order minimum: \$10.00

While quantities last, sizes are limited

Denim shirts sold as is - no returns please. 



2009 SDMS Annual Conference Call for Course and Faculty Proposals

PROPOSALS DUE BY OCTOBER 31, 2008



The SDMS Conference Management Committee (CMC) will begin planning the 2009 SDMS Annual Conference shortly after the conclusion of the 2008 Conference in Mashantucket, CT. To assist the CMC in its continuing efforts to provide a conference that meets your needs and exceeds your expectations, you are encouraged to submit course and faculty proposals for the 2009 SDMS Annual Conference in Nashville, TN. All proposals will be considered by the CMC during the 2009 SDMS Annual Conference planning meetings.

Course proposals should contain the following:

- Course Title
- Course Learning Objectives
- Brief Course Description
- Suggested Length
- Suggested Format (lecture, case presentation, etc.)
- Suggested Faculty Names and Contact Information

The CMC reviews all proposals and may:

- Accept the proposal as submitted
- Accept the proposal as submitted but choose a different speaker to present the course
- Modify the proposal
- Not select the proposed course

The CMC will consider many factors when reviewing the proposals. For example:

- Needs assessment data
- Appropriateness of the course
- Attendees' evaluation of previous courses and faculty
- Number of courses allotted in each educational track
- Availability of faculty in geographic proximity to the 2009 SDMS Annual Conference in Nashville
- Ability of faculty to present several courses
- Budgetary restraints or concerns

By January 31, 2009, you can expect a letter from the CMC regarding the action taken on your proposal(s). The CMC will carefully consider each submitted proposal. It is important to understand that the faculty you recommend will not automatically be chosen if your course proposal is accepted. However, if the CMC selects the faculty you recommend, that person will be contacted by one of the committee members with an invitation to present the course.

To submit a proposal:

Please email your proposal to meetings@sdms.org or mail it to:

SDMS
Attn: Meetings
2745 N Dallas Pkwy Ste 350
Plano, TX 75093-8730



2009 SDMS Annual Conference
Gaylord Opryland • Nashville, TN • October 15-18, 2009



SDMS Answers Your Calls

SDMS shares its answers to our members' most frequently asked questions!

“Am I too late to register for the 2008 SDMS Annual Conference?”

“Is there still time to order SDMS Medical Ultrasound Awareness Month (MUAM) products?”

Good news– you're NOT too late!

SDMS will be accepting on-site registrations for its 2008 SDMS Annual Conference in Mashantucket, CT, at the beautiful Foxwoods Resort & Casino.

Join us October 16-19, for the perfect balance of learning, excitement and relaxation. For more information about this educational opportunity of the year, visit <http://www.sdms.org/meetings>, and we'll see you at the Foxwoods!

* Currently all rooms at the Foxwoods Resort & Casino are **sold out** on Friday October 17 and Saturday October 18. An alternate nearby property that offers limited shuttle service between Foxwoods and their hotel is **Hill Top Inn and Suites**: (877) 965-0500 <http://www.hilltopinnandsuites.com>

As for your MUAM product needs....

Yes, you still have time to place your order. SDMS will continue to sell its MUAM products while quantities last. Don't miss out on this year's popular design, Sonography – sound it out! Find out how to place your order at <http://www.sdms.org/pdf/catalog.pdf>. Items are selling fast!

* Orders received during business hours before 3:00 p.m. CST will be shipped the next business day, depending on product availability.



SDMS makes every effort to provide superior customer service to its members. If you have a question that you would like featured in *SDMS Answers Your Calls*, please email membercall@sdms.org.

SDMS Welcomes New Members

August 2008

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Xenia Adversalo BS	Jacqueline Castellon	Susan Fiehler BA, RDMS	Jenny Hollis RT(R)
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