ASUM

Standards of Practice

Promoting ultrasound excellence



Guidelines, Policies and Statements

Statement on the Practice of Ultrasound by Sonographers

Formerly Role of the Sonographer
Adopted by Council February 1996
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Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	3
2.	Education, Training and Supervision Trainee Sonographers	3
3.	Continuing Professional Development (CPD)	3
4.	Responsibilities of the Sonographer	4
	4.1 Sonographer Responsibilities	4
	4.2 Professional Behaviour	5
	4.3 Ethical Behaviour	5
	4.4 Quality Assurance	6
5.	Professional Progression	6
6.	Breaches of this Statement	7

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1. Introduction

Ultrasound is used in healthcare as a diagnostic modality to provide information so that a medical practitioner may institute appropriate patient management.

1.1 All sonographers who provide an ultrasound service should be specifically trained and hold an appropriate credential.

1.2 ASUM currently recognises the Australasian Sonographer Accreditation Registry (ASAR) as the accreditation agency for Medical Sonographers in Australia.

1.3 The New Zealand Medical Radiation Technologists Board (NZMRTB) is the Registration Board for Medical Sonographers New Zealand. In New Zealand, cardiac sonographers can also be registered as clinical physiologists.

1.4 Only persons who hold a qualification accredited by ASAR or NZMRTB should be called a sonographer and be employed to work as a Sonographer in a public hospital or private practice.

1.5 Sonographers are health care professionals who practice as an integral component of the imaging team.

1.6 Sonographers are health care professionals who:

1.6.1 Have completed an approved course of practical and theoretical study leading to an accredited qualification specific to the practice of diagnostic ultrasound, and

1.6.2 Are accredited or registered to practice in Australia or New Zealand, and are practising ultrasound consistent with their training, qualifications and experience

1.7 Sonographers are members of health care teams providing quality diagnostic services. By the nature of ultrasound examinations sonographers, compared with other imaging technologists, are accorded a high level of autonomy and responsibility in obtaining accurate diagnostic information from the ultrasound examination.

1.8 The Australasian Society for Ultrasound in Medicine (ASUM) recognises general ultrasound, cardiac ultrasound, vascular ultrasound and obstetrics and gynaecology ultrasound as distinct specialties and offers qualifications in these specialties.

1.9 Sonographers will only practice within their scope of proficiency and should be prepared to recommend an appropriate alternative if necessary.

1.10 Sonographers should maintain professional competence by undertaking regular continuing professional development (CPD) activities.

2. Education, Training and Supervision of Trainee Sonographers

See ASUM Policy Document *Statement on the Education, Training and Supervision of Trainee Sonographers*.

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3. Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

3.1 A sonographer should maintain a wide range of general knowledge in the following curriculum areas as well as a detailed knowledge in their areas of clinical specialty:

- Human anatomy, embryology, physiology and pathology. In particular, it is a necessity to have a three-dimensional conceptual understanding of sonographic anatomical appearances, normal variations and pathological processes, in order to develop differential diagnoses
- The physical principles of diagnostic ultrasound, including how the images are formed and recorded, and the associated artefacts which can be encountered
- The principles of safety of ultrasound, including possible bioeffects and biohazards, and the implications regarding safe use of the equipment and practice

3.2 A sonographer should maintain comprehensive knowledge and understanding of relevant changes in technology and practice.

3.3 A sonographer will ensure maintenance of skills by undertaking the training necessary to implement newly developed techniques in clinical practice.

3.4 To maintain professional competence, sonographers must maintain a high level of CPD throughout their careers:

- ASUM recognises that competent sonographers generally undertake between 50 and 150 hours of CPD each year
- ASUM currently accepts the ASAR benchmark of a minimum 40 hours of learning activity directly relevant to their practice as the minimum triennial requirement to maintain accreditation

4. Responsibilities of Sonographers

4.1 Sonographers are responsible for providing information and diagnostic sonographic evidence required by the sonologist, radiologist or other reporting clinician to compile their diagnosis and subsequent report on the examination.

- Sonographers should practice within their scope of practice and in those areas in which they are formally qualified and experienced
- Sonographers should perform ultrasound examinations proficiently and in accordance with ASUM Guidelines
- Sonographers will seek to answer the clinical question raised in the referral and will extend the sonographic examination to other areas as may be indicated by the findings during the examination, within the guidelines of the practice
- Sonographers will practice excellent communication skills in order to conduct examinations in a caring and professional manner
- Sonographers will understand medical practice and use appropriate terminology to ensure professional communication with other medical and allied health practitioners

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- Sonographers will provide a report to the medical practitioner, if requested, containing detail of the findings together with images to support their findings (including all of those images required by ASUM protocols and the protocols of the hospital or practice in which they are employed)
- The extent to which the content of a sonographer's report is communicated to other practitioners and/or the patient is the decision of the medical practitioner, who takes responsibility for that content which is communicated
- Patients have the right to access their medical information. When patients request their medical information sonographers should ensure that medical practitioners have access to the relevant information in the patient's medical records
- The extent to which sonographers may communicate their findings to other practitioners and/or the patient is determined by the formal documented policies of the hospital or practice in which they are employed. To the extent that this is mandated, the clinical principals of the hospital department or practice assume responsibility for the communicated findings

4.2 Professional Behaviour

- The extent of the examination performed by a sonographer will be defined by the clinical presentation of the patient. The examination should not be extended for social or commercial reasons
- With the informed consent of the patient, an examination may be conducted or extended in order to instruct other sonographers or medical practitioners, or for the purposes of an authorised ethical research project
- Sonographers will keep records of all examinations and findings using the protocols and systems provided by the hospital or practice in which they are employed
- Sonographers should assist in the education of student sonographers and medical practitioners with a clinical interest in diagnostic ultrasound
- Sonographers should ensure that they are adequately indemnified by their employers for claims relating to professional conduct. Where such insurance does not exist, or is considered inadequate, sonographers might seek professional indemnity insurance either through a professional association or privately
- Sonographers should collaborate with peers to enhance standards of practice, and to promote communication, respect and ethical practice, through active membership of an appropriate professional society or association

4.3 Ethical Behaviour

Sonographers will:

- Promote honest and appropriate communications with patients, colleagues and other health care professionals and ensure that information is not misrepresented

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- Provide the patient with information about the nature and purpose of the examination
- Answer patients' questions and respond to patients' concerns by providing relevant information
- Obtain informed consent for the examination or procedure and respect the autonomy of the patient and their right to refuse the examination
- Respect the individuality of the patient by providing care in a non-discriminatory and non-judgemental way
- Respect the privacy of the patient by protecting the identity of the patient in any clinical discussion of the case
- Patient information should be kept in confidence by sonographers. Sharing a patient's information should only be done for the safety and therapeutic benefit of the patient. The only exceptions to this are:
    a) In the event of a medical emergency
    b) If a serious and imminent risk or threat of harm to the patient exists
    c) As required by law
- Promote the dignity and comfort of the patient by appropriate positioning and draping.
- Protect the safety of the patient by careful positioning and by minimising the ultrasound exposure and thermal indices in keeping with the ALARA (as low as reasonably achievable) principles

4.4 Quality assurance

- Sonographers will not offer a patient an inferior service in a situation where a superior service is reasonably accessible to the patient
- Sonographers should avoid conflicts of interest
- Sonographers will ensure that the equipment they use is functioning properly. They will monitor equipment to ensure it is functioning properly, and will recognise and report any faults
- The sonographer should be consulted in the selection of new equipment for purchase. In evaluating new equipment, the sonographer will seek to ensure that the equipment purchased is of sufficient standard and quality to maintain a highest possible standard of ultrasound service in the prevailing clinical environment. In doing so, they will avoid influence from previous loyalties and specific inducements

5. Professional Progression

5.1 A career structure should exist that reflects the needs of the wider community and that facilitates the improvement of practice standards.

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5.2 The career structure should encourage sonographers to progress professionally and remuneratively to a level reflecting their capability and contribution.

5.3 Promotion through the career structure should reflect aptitude and skill.

5.4 Individuals with aptitude should be encouraged and facilitated in pursuing advanced courses/subjects to assist in personal fulfilment and career advancement.

5.5 ASUM supports the development of higher qualifications to meet the aspirations of sonographers for credentialing within their profession.

5.6 ASUM recognises that many senior sonographers possess a level of expertise in diagnostic imaging which is rarely matched within the broader medical and health communities. These sonographers are frequently called upon as educators and supervisors in ultrasound for the wider medical community. ASUM supports the development of appropriate recognition for these sonographers and in so doing ASUM invites the major stake-holders in the broader ultrasound community including (but not limited to) the ASAR, RANZCR (The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists), ASA (The Australasian Sonographers Association) and MRTB to participate collaboratively in creating and formalising a suitable pathway towards formal recognition of expert sonographers.

6. Breaches of this Statement

Breaches of this Statement should be reported to an employee's supervisor or employer. If this does not resolve the issue complaints should be directed to the Healthcare Complaints Commission (HCCC).

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