



ADVANCED CARDIOVASCULAR SONOGRAPHY

A REVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROFESSION

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ASE RESPONDS TO NEED FOR CAREER LADDER FOR CARDIOVASCULAR SONOGRAPHERS BY SPONSORING PROGRAMMATIC CURRICULUM ACCREDITATION

Data collected by the American Society of Echocardiography (ASE) Advanced Sonography Taskforce in the early 2000's, demonstrated a need for an educational pathway to recognize an advanced cardiovascular sonographer (ACS).

2007 NEEDS SURVEY

657 RESPONDENTS

94% indicated interest in acquiring information about an ACS Program

86% indicated interest in going back to school to become an ACS

At that time, many institutions recognized sonographers as entry level or senior sonographers. Promotion from entry level to senior sonographer was largely granted based on years of experience, maintaining active credentials, and completing required continuing medical education. Surveys demonstrated that many sonographers (approximately 20%) would leave the field if a career ladder was not implemented or opportunities to gain advanced skills for the profession were not developed.¹ In December 2009, a proposal for the ACS was published.² The proposal included a description of the advanced cardiovascular sonographer role, a professional educational pathway (to include required clinical experience and didactic knowledge with a suggested curriculum), and provided a mechanism for recognizing sonographers practicing with advanced clinical skills and knowledge.²

After the publication of the article, the next step was to go to the Commission on Accreditation for Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) and request recognition of the ACS as a profession. ASE supported the proposal by financially sponsoring the creation of the Committee on Accreditation for Advanced Cardiovascular Sonography (CoA-ACS). The CoA-ACS was tasked with writing the educational standards and guidelines for the new profession. In 2012, CAAHEP endorsed the *Standards and Guidelines* allowing eligible programs to be recognized as accredited ACS programs by CAAHEP.

ASE became the initial organizational sponsor for CoA-ACS and has continually supported the ACS role and continuing education for sonographers.

CoA-ACS ROLE

The CoA-ACS Board of Directors is comprised of physicians, sonographers, and other stakeholders of the cardiovascular sonography community with varied backgrounds appointed by the sponsoring organizations. The CoA-ACS board performs the day-to-day work of reviewing program self-studies, and coordinates and participates in site visits. Based on information provided in the self-study and the site visit, CoA-ACS makes program accreditation recommendations to the CAAHEP Board of Directors. CAAHEP will then determine the accreditation action and is the accreditor of all CAAHEP-accredited ACS educational programs.

The ACS professional provides a unique and essential service beyond technical performance as they practice at a higher level in the echocardiography laboratory. The ACS integrates knowledge of clinical practice roles with education, research methodology, management, leadership, and consultation. Accredited ACS programs are graduating sonographers who possess advanced knowledge and skills. This is further validated by taking a board examination and earning the Advanced Cardiac Sonographer (ACS) credential. At this time, the registry examination for the ACS is offered by Cardiovascular Credentialing International (CCI).³

“The rigorous ACS program has tremendously impacted my life personally and professionally. First and foremost, the program has improved my critical thinking skills and given me the knowledge to be a better sonographer for my patients. The program has also opened doors for my career that were not possible before; such as becoming the lead of an accredited cardiac lab, mentoring young sonographers, or potentially moving into a managerial role. Finally, along with opening career doors, the program has given me the ability to better provide for my family. My decision to go through the ACS program is one of the best I have made for my career, and something I would recommend to any sonographer looking for advancement in the field.”

Sarah L. Griffith, BS, RDCS(AE, PE), ACS, CRMC Graduate

Some ACS programs are designed for students to continue working while enrolled in the ACS program. Currently there are two CAAHEP-accredited ACS programs.⁴ ACS programs require didactic course work and completion of clinical education rotations/internships. Both accredited ACS programs have reached, or will reach, the five-year mark for continuing accreditation in 2021 and 2022.

Currently, the educational pathway and credential is limited to echocardiography. The CoA-ACS Board invites all ultrasound specialties to partner with the CoA-ACS to explore additional educational pathways in advanced sonography in other learning concentrations. SDMS currently partners with ASE on the COA-ACS organization, and we invite others to join us.

WHY ASE SUPPORTS ACS EDUCATION AND CREDENTIAL

Prior to development of the ACS, sonographers had limited opportunities for career advancement. Cardiac sonographers with advanced knowledge and skills were longing for an opportunity to function in a different role from that of the new graduate or senior sonographer. ASE listened to the needs of its members and supported the ACS role and an educational pathway to achieve their earned recognition.

ASE's mission is "To advance cardiovascular ultrasound and improve lives through excellence in education, research, innovation, advocacy, and service to the profession and the public." Supporting continuing education and the ACS professional pathway and credential is important in achieving this mission.

Patients will be better served by echocardiography labs using services of the ACS who has the education, training, and experience to review echocardiographic examinations and provide the most accurate cardiac diagnostic information for physicians to treat patients. Clinical practice will be enhanced by improvements to the quality of the examinations and by the availability of professionals who can assist with the teaching and incorporation of advancements in the field into daily practice.

Echocardiography is a team profession requiring collaboration between the sonographer and physician. An ACS facilitates this collaboration by being able to assist sonographers with tailoring the exam to answer the clinical question and reviewing image quality prior to release of the patient. A sonographer with the ACS credential can also acquire additional images or teach sonographers how to use advanced technology to ensure clinical questions are answered. ASE supports the ACS role because of its contribution to improved patient care and exam quality, and because it can also serve as a means for sonographer advancement thereby helping to retain key employees.

For more information about CoA-ASC, please contact COAACCS@gmail.com.

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