



The VOICE for the Vascular Ultrasound Profession since 1977

March 8, 2006

SPI Prerequisite
ARDMS
51 Monroe Street, Plaza East One
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear ARDMS:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the examination prerequisites for the Sonography Principles and Instrumentation (SPI) examination currently under development by the ARDMS. The Board of Directors of the Society for Vascular Ultrasound (SVU) has focused a great deal of effort on this very important issue. As you recall, SVU was opposed to the removal of the specialty physics exam for a number of reasons, previously shared in our comment letter to ARDMS of 8/14/2003. If the new SPI exam approach is to be successful, we believe the exam content and prerequisites should be thoughtfully developed and carefully implemented.

SVU is puzzled by the proposal(s) to consider modifying the prerequisite(s) for the new sonography principles and instrumentation (SPI) examination. Since its inception as an independent credentialing body, the ARDMS has strongly advocated and successfully upheld the need for two separate exams, each addressing unique and critical components of ultrasound and clinical knowledge. To our knowledge, each exam was considered to be equally important to the assessment of candidates' minimal competence. If this is true, then the prerequisites for each component of the exam should be equal. Therefore, in response to the first question posed in your request for public comment, SVU's response to public comment question #1 is "a": The ARDMS should retain the same prerequisites that pertain to the current physical principles and instrumentation examinations.

Following is SVU's rationale for our opinion:

1. The SVU believes that the content of both the physical principles and vascular technology exams go hand in hand, with knowledge of one area being enhanced by an understanding of the other. We do not believe that a vascular technologist can be deemed "minimally competent" until he/she has actually applied the knowledge acquired in the classroom to the clinical setting. Therefore, if candidates are allowed to sit for the physical principles exam while still completing their ultrasound education, they would lack a crucial component of the educational process, actual application of their knowledge to patient testing. SVU does not believe the SPI exam would be an adequate tool to assure minimal competence if it were designed to merely evaluate a student's ability to recite the physical principles acquired in the classroom before they have applied those principles in the clinical environment. In addition to the clinical prerequisites, we believe the student does not have adequate overall knowledge

to sit for either component of the examination until the classroom and clinical components of the educational program has been combined with first-hand clinical experience, currently required for the VPI and VT examinations.

2. Students and other candidates preparing to sit for the RVT examination would likely embrace the removal of prerequisites for the SPI examination because it would allow individuals previously excluded from the process to participate. But is this good for the profession, if unqualified candidates are taking the exam? What if the unqualified pass the exam, what does this say for the exam content? And what if the opposite outcome occurs -- all candidates are allowed to sit for the exam but the majority is unsuccessful? Will they abandon their effort to become credentialed? It would be a huge blow to the effort to require credentialing and fill vacancies within the profession if an even larger number of first-time candidates are unsuccessful! The message must be consistent and firm: when you have met the prerequisites for both exams, you can sit for one/both portions of the exam.
3. If the SPI prerequisites are modified or discontinued, then we are faced with another age-old issue: the "registry eligible" candidate! For years, we have observed members of SVU who state that they are "registry eligible" -- a message that implies that they are competent and equal to their colleagues who have acquired the RVT credential. This matter has confused employers for years -- the candidates have met the requirements, so they must be competent, right? If the "registry eligibility" is modified, then this problem may become even more problematic.
4. What happens to candidates who successfully complete the SPI examination, but never take the specialty exam? Those candidates may have met the "modified" prerequisites but do not/may never meet the prerequisites for the specialty examination. Again, these candidates are lost in a credentialing limbo that does not serve them well, and offers additional confusion to potential employers, desperate for qualified vascular technologists
5. The modification of SVI prerequisites is a slippery slope for all ARDMS prerequisites. This action could result in an avalanche of individuals who take and pass the exam, particularly those who have been 'on the fence' for years. But, what if these same candidates then petition to have the specialty prerequisites "modified"? Will it become necessary to modify the definition of "minimal competence?" Finally, if these same candidates are unsuccessful with the SPI exam, even with "modified" prerequisites, they may never sit for the specialty exam. Either scenario would be an unwelcome outcome for our profession.
6. By removing the prerequisites for one exam component, the ARDMS sends the message that the exams are not of equal importance. SVU contends that an understanding of physical principles and instrumentation is crucial to the provision of quality vascular technology examinations. In the past, the "physics" exam has served the role of gatekeeper for quality standards. It assures employers and patients that the candidate understands the fundamental principles of ultrasound, instrumentation and patient safety. We believe that candidates sitting for this portion of the credentialing exam should be as qualified as those sitting for the

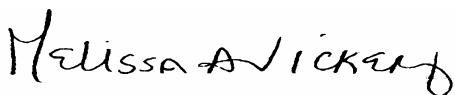
specialty exam. SVU does not wish to penalize qualified candidates, rather we choose to recognize their accomplishments. We believe the maintenance of attainable and necessary prerequisites will recognize the value of education and reinforce the need to achieve more, rather than less.

7. SVU appreciates the desire of educators to ensure that their students sit for the examinations prior to graduation. The outcome data from these students is required by most university and educational settings, and serves to direct curriculum changes that will be beneficial to future students. However, we believe that “teaching to an exam” is not always in the best interest of the student or the patients they evaluate, and allowing students to sit for the exam short-circuits the value of the clinical experience acquired after graduation.
8. The SVU already has concerns that the removal of specialty specific physical principles has the potential to “water down” the RVT credential. We are hopeful that the vascular technology component of the exam will be designed to evaluate the breadth of knowledge required to be a competent vascular technologist.
9. In addition, SVU believes there is no other profession that allows students to sit for any portion of a certifying or licensure exam before completion of the program. For instance, CPA’s must complete all requirements before taking the entire CPA exam. Nurses must graduate before taking any portion of their State Board exam. Lawyers cannot sit for the Bar until they have completed law school. Thus, SVU sees no reason why vascular technologists or any sonographers should be allowed to take any of their credentialing exams until they have met the MINIMUM level educational and prerequisite experience requirements. It is not important that they can regurgitate physical principles, but more important that they can APPLY those physical principles to their daily job.

In conclusion, SVU respectfully requests that as the ARDMS moves toward this significant change in the exam process, that the prerequisites remain unchanged.

Thank you for giving SVU the opportunity to submit its comments on the prerequisites for the new SPI Examination.

Sincerely,



Melissa A. Vickery, LPN-B, RVT
SVU President