

QUESTIONS ABOUT RECERTIFICATION AND THE RPSGT CREDENTIAL

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The Board of Registered Polysomnographic Technologists (BRPT) recently changed their recertification policy for Registered Polysomnographic Technologists. The new policy mandates that all RPSGTs, even those previously 'grandfathered,' or under the '10-year recertification plan,' must now recertify every 5 years by either earning 50 continuing education hours in five years (with a minimum of 5 each year), or by re-taking the RPSGT exam. If you don't recertify every five years, you may no longer call yourself a Registered Polysomnographic Technologist, or use RPSGT after your name.

Why the change? "Two main reasons," explains Bobby Stanley, Executive Director of the BRPT. "Patient safety and the necessity for high standards. Given the speed of change in the sleep technology field, this is the right course of action to assure that we keep pace with other allied health professionals involved in delivering the highest standards of patient care."

The RPSGT is often referred to as the 'gold standard' for polysomnographic technologists and Stanley is aware of that. "Many people have worked hard to earn that high level of professional recognition and it's critical for us to continue to protect and maintain that credibility," he says. Part of maintaining the standard, according to Stanley, means RPSGTs must continue their education and stay abreast of the latest trends, techniques, methods and equipment.

Much of the feedback on recertification validates the decision made by the 11-member Board. "Many of the people involved in sleep technology understand that this is a rapidly changing field and

in order to best serve the needs of patients it is imperative to stay on top of those changes." While he acknowledges his staff has received a few disgruntled calls, almost without exception, once the reasons for the changes are explained the individual understands and is supportive.

The BRPT has also built in extra 'transition' time for those who were grandfathered or who were on the 10-year recertification plan.

Ever since news of the change in recertification policy was issued in June, BRPT has been inundated with phone calls and emails from RPSGTs who want to be sure they understand what they need to do to stay on the recertification track. The Recertification Guidelines available on the BRPT web site at www.brpt.org are comprehensive, but a survey of BRPT staff found these to be the most common questions RPSGTs are asking:

Q. Why did the BRPT change their recertification policy?

A. The BRPT has a responsibility to the profession and the public to assure that RPSGTs continue their education and keep their skills updated, particularly in a field as dynamic as sleep medicine. In addition, the BRPT is currently accredited by the National Commission of Certifying Agencies (NCCA). The NCCA and other accrediting bodies require a formal recertification process that includes a "same policy for all" approach. The BRPT is adhering to best practices for credentialing programs and working to ensure that the RPSGT certification continues to be recognized as the leading credential for polysomnographic technologists by the medical community, allied health professions, legislative bodies and other regulatory decision-makers, and the public.

Q. I'm a 'grandfathered' RPSGT. Someone on my staff is under the 10-year recertification plan. Do the new policies affect us?

A. Yes! All RPSGTs must now certify every 5 years in order to retain the use of their credential. Details on your particular circumstances are available at www.brpt.org.

Q. Where can I find a list of approved courses that offer continuing education credits?

A. At the BRPT web site you may click on the Recertification and Continuing Education button, then click on Continuing Education. A link is provided to the APT web site where courses are listed. In addition, BRPT is working with other organizations to expand the courses listed. Most important to remember – as long as your credits are earned from activities approved by a credit-granting organization AND the hours are directly related to sleep technology those hours should be acceptable for recertification.

Q. I was grandfathered which means my recertification period begins January 1, 2007. How can I apply credits earned at a sleep conference I attend in October 2006 to my recertification?

A. If you write to the BRPT to request a switch to 5-year recertification any time before the October 2006 conference, your 5-year recertification period will begin from the date you make the switch, and credits earned from that point will count toward your 50 needed for recertification. You'll find an official form to voluntarily switch to the 5 year recertification program on the www.brpt.org website.

Q. I live in a remote area. Are there ways for me to earn credits

without attending a sleep conference?

A. Yes. The APT offers credits for reading A2Zzz magazine. By signing up on their site you can get an assessment tool for each edition. Fees for those who aren't members of APT may apply. Their page is <http://www.aptweb.org/CECProgramCalendar.asp>. Other ways of earning credits include in-service training programs and online courses. BRPT's Education Advisory Committee is working with other organizations to encourage the expansion of those options as well.

Q. Does it matter how many continuing education hours I obtain each year?

A. Yes! While BRPT recommends that you earn 10 each year during your 5 year recertification period (thereby accumulating 50 total) be advised that under the new rules, it is required that you earn a minimum of 5 continuing education hours/year.

Q. What if I do not recertify?

A. If you do not recertify within ninety days after the date your recertification is due, you will no longer have the right to use the RPSGT credential.

Q. Can I retake the exam to recertify?

A. Yes, absolutely. While the BRPT encourages continuing education on an ongoing basis, you may recertify by taking and passing the RPSGT exam. If you choose this option we recommend you take the exam 6 months before your recertification deadline to allow for any possible retesting. Normal examination fees will apply under this option.

Q. I am an RPSGT working outside the U.S. How will I be able to obtain credits?

A. There are credit-granting organizations outside the U.S. such as the British Sleep Society, the European Sleep Research Society and the Asian Sleep Research Society. In addition, some credits offered through APT may be earned online.

Q. When it's time to recertify, what do I do?

A. There is an optional recertification tracking form you can download from the BRPT web site now. As it gets closer to the first recertification period, there will be a downloadable Recertification Application Form to complete and send to the BRPT along with your required documentation and fee. You can only apply for recertification starting 6 months prior to your actual recertification date.

Q. I am an RPSGT working outside the U.S. How will I be able to obtain credits?

A. There are many credit-granting organizations outside the U.S. such as the British Sleep Society, the European Sleep Research Society and the Asian Sleep Research Society, to name just a few, that offer sleep-related courses that will be accepted. In addition, international programs can be submitted to the APT for credit approval. Some US credit granting organizations such as the APT either have or will have online or courses that can be purchased for credits.

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Q. I'm an instructor. Can I use gain credit hours for courses I teach?

A. Presenters of materials approved for continuing education hours by a credit-granting organization may count the hours of a given presentation only once toward recertification annually. Example: If a program is approved for three hours of continuing education and is presented at three regional meetings during the same year, the presenter may only count three hours toward recertification. If presented again the following year, three additional hours may be counted.

Q. How do I know if a course or activity is acceptable for RPSGT recertification credits?

A. If the activity has been granted credits by a credit-granting organization and the activity is directly related to sleep technologist duties it should be acceptable.