

A SHORT COURSE ON THE RPSGT SLEEP TECHNOLOGIST CREDENTIAL *by Bonnie Robertson RPSGT*



Have you ever considered adding a credential (or a second credential) after your name? Doing so can have many benefits – from such intangibles as the personal satisfaction of achieving a goal to real-world benefits such as increased salary and career opportunities. Becoming a Registered Polysomnographic Technologist (RPSGT) helps you gain entry into "sleep" – one of the fastest growing health professions. It's a field that is young, exciting – and rewarding – on many levels. Listen to physicians and technologists who work with sleep patients and you'll sense a tremendous degree of satisfaction. Patients with even severe sleep problems and disorders are often treatable and lives are often dramatically changed for the better. The journey to becoming an RPSGT starts with getting to know the Board of Registered Polysomnographic Technologists (BRPT) and visiting their web site at www.brpt.org.

About 'The Board'

It's the non-profit BRPT that is at the forefront of sleep technologist credentialing – administering the RPSGT exam, advocating for the profession and setting the standard for competency and patient care. At any given time, the 11-member Board includes a number of sleep technology veterans, several who have earned both the RPSGT and related credentials in electroneurodiagnostics or respiratory care, a sleep disorders physician, plus two "public members" – people who have had sleep disorders and have demonstrated a commitment to sleep

as an issue of importance to public health. The Board, along with the BRPT staff headquartered just outside of Washington, D.C. in McLean, Virginia work on a wide range of issues related to the sleep profession, including developing, maintaining and administering the RPSGT exam, expanding the number of test sites in the U.S. and internationally, building alliances within the allied health professions, communicating the importance of working with a RPSGT to doctors and patients, and advocating on government affairs, legislative and regulatory issues. The Board was among the first 20 members named to the new National Sleep Awareness Roundtable (NSART), a coalition of government, professional, voluntary and other organizations whose mission is to raise awareness about; increase the understanding of; and reduce the public health and safety impact of sleep deprivation and sleep disorders by improving communication and collaboration among local, state and federal agencies, professional organizations and the public.

What is a Registered Polysomnographic Technologist™?

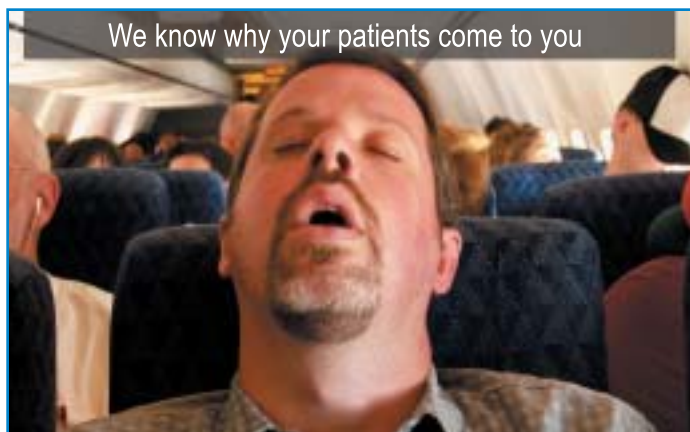
An RPSGT is a fully trained sleep technologist who has met all the requirements to become credentialed by the Board of Registered Polysomnographic Technologists. These credentials represent the highest standard in the field of sleep technology. An increasing number of health professionals and organizations are recommending that whenever a sleep study is advised, patients should educate themselves about the process and be proactive in requesting that their polysomnogram be conducted by or under the direction of an RPSGT. To become an RPSGT you must pass a rigorous, 4-hour, 200-question, computer-based, multiple choice exam and agree to abide by the Board of Registered Polysomnographic Technologists' Code of Ethics and Standards of Conduct. To maintain your credential, you must recertify every five years by earning 50 continuing education credits (a minimum of 5 credits each year, but 50 total). Alternatively, you may recertify by re-taking and passing the RPSGT examination. Only those deemed eligible by the BRPT may sit for the exam.

About the RPSGT Exam and Eligibility

The exam is administered at hundreds of test sites around the world during 4 testing windows during the year (spring, summer, winter, fall). Each testing window is about 2-weeks long, allowing applicants to take the exam at a convenient time that does not interfere with work, family or religious schedules. Those eligible to take the examination include professionals with 18 months of paid clinical experience in polysomnography, credentialed professionals with 6 months of paid clinical experience in polysomnography from a BRPT-accepted health-related field such as nursing, respiratory care and electroneurodiagnostics, or graduates of programs with special recognition in polysomnography and accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP).

The Value of the Credential

Earning the RPSGT credential is one way to make a start in the sleep field – or transition from an allied health profession such as respiratory care. If you're already working with sleep patients, earn-



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ing the credential is a way to differentiate yourself from other sleep techs and establish immediately that you are invested in the profession, have achieved a minimal level of core competency and continue to educate yourself about polysomnographic technology. In the sleep medicine field, the RPSGT credential is the mark of a highly skilled allied health care professional who has met the high standards of the Board of Registered Polysomnographic Technologists, an internationally recognized and accredited organization.

Increased Career Opportunities

In any profession, it is commonly accepted that credentialed workers earn more than those who are not certified. Similarly, it is commonly accepted that within the same geographic region, RPSGTs earn more than non-registered sleep techs and there is evidence that an increasing number of employers prefer to hire RPSGTs. Many employers consider the RPSGT credential a preferred requirement for job applicants. For many, earning the credential translates into an immediate increase in salary.

RPSGTs Make A Difference

Often RPSGTs start their careers working in a sleep facility in an administrative or assistant-level capacity. Others start as nurses, electroneurodiagnosticians, emergency care personnel, respiratory techs or medical doctors. It is not unusual for an RPSGT to be dual-credentialed. By excelling in their field, RPSGTs are indispensable to the diagnosis, treatment and after care of many sleep disorders. A registered sleep tech truly helps patients live better, healthier lives.

The professionalism that comes from being knowledgeable in the sleep medicine field helps increase visibility and credibility for this important –and growing – medical discipline.

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Change Request appeared without any notice or opportunity for comment. These changes were to be effective 30 days later on February 26. But in response to industry outcry, CMS rescinded the changes one week before their effective date on Feb. 19, 2007.

Why was there opposition to the Program Integrity changes?

Basically, the changes went much farther than the Performance Standards. For example, the Performance Standards are silent about when billing dates can start or leasing restrictions. The proposed Program Integrity changes did.

So, under current rules, if you are an IDTF seeking first-time enrollment, you would be able to back bill from the date you met all supplier qualifications, even if Medicare issued your Medicare number months later. Under the proposed changes, IDTF's could receive reimbursement only after they received their Medicare number. This makes no sense, because to get your number, you must apply only after you have your staff in place and equipment purchased with the doors ready to open for business. Then you would have to put the entire operation into hibernation for months or provide free Medicare service until the number issued.

The new Manual changes would have also prohibited IDTF's from sharing space or equipment with another active Medicare supplier. Many IDTF's lease space with physicians or others as a normal course of business. There was no explanation how to apply this prohibition – whether it applied only to Medicare providers or Medicare suppliers or if persons were exempt other than physician-owned IDTF's.

What else did the changes want to do?

One change was a requirement that technicians working at IDTF's would be full-time W-2 employees of the IDTF where they worked. IDTF's already require that sleep technicians be certified as an RPSGT or hold such other certification required by the local Medicare carrier. The proposed rule would require the technicians to be full-time employees rather than independent contractors.

What happened next?

Well, without press announcement or explanation, CMS simply posted a rescission notice on its web site on February 19. The entire text of CR 5449, "Implementation of New Compliance Standards for Independent Diagnostic Testing Facilities (IDTFs)," was expunged from the Program Integrity Manual. In its place, CMS left this short message: "NOTE: The CR 5449, dated January 26, 2007 is rescinded and will not be replaced at this time. Please discard all materials related to CR 5449. We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused." The text can be found at <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/transmittals/downloads/R187PI.pdf>.

Will IDTF operators see these changes again in some other form?

We don't know at this time. CMS is not talking publicly about this matter. It is likely that CMS will try to impose the spirit of two or three of the proposed restrictions in the future. If so, it is likely that such changes would be run through the customary rulemaking process. At a minimum, that would permit industry participants to comment on the unintended effects of the changes or suggest modifications to make compliance possible.

As Dan Brown recommends, sleep professionals at all IDTF sleep labs need to stay alert to these possible changes and be sure they are complying with the new IDTF performance standards.

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