



YOU CAN DO IT: PREPARING TO BECOME A REGISTERED SLEEP TECHNOLOGIST

by Helen Sullivan

Have you considered becoming a registered polysomnographic technologist and adding RPSGT after your name? It is not uncommon for respiratory therapists or those already working in the sleep field to decide to become a Registered Sleep Technologist (RPSGT). For many it is their first credential, but a growing number of those already holding a professional certification, choose to add yet another title to their list of credentials. There are currently about 11,000 RPSGTs and the job market is strong in many regions. Recently, Newsday, the 12th largest newspaper in the U.S., identified sleep technology as an "emerging profession," no doubt related to the fact that sleep medicine is one of the fastest growing of the

medical specialties.

Many people entering the field are already RTs, CRTs, electroneurodiagnostic technologists, nurses, or other allied-health professionals. Adding polysomnographic technology to their skill set

often brings more than just a title change. It allows those currently in the health profession to expand their career opportunities. Adding to your skills and becoming a RPSGT frequently brings renewed interest and excitement into day-to-day work life. Sleep technologists have the satisfaction of seeing patients' lives truly improve through proper diagnosis and care.

Many who come from a background in respiratory care discover that their experience and knowledge can give them an advantage in preparing for the RPSGT exam. This knowledge coupled with clinical experience in respiratory care can make it easier to recognize the interrelationships between sleep apnea, for instance, and other diseases.

What does it take?

An RPSGT is a fully trained sleep technologist who has met the rigorous requirements to become credentialed by the Board of Registered Polysomnographic Technologists. These credentials represent the highest standard in the field of sleep technology. To become RPSGT credentialed, technologists must have the necessary clinical experience criteria, have CPR certification or its equivalent, pass a rigorous examination, maintain a high level of competence and expertise in the field of polysomnography and adhere to strict rules of conduct. To maintain your credential, you must recertify every five years through continuing education – or by retaking the exam.

What type of exam is it?

To earn the RPSGT you must pass a computer-based examination and agree to abide by the Board of Registered Polysomnographic Technologists Code of Ethics and Standards of Conduct. The test presents each multiple-choice question with four response alternatives (A, B, C, and D). One of these represents the single best response, and credit is granted only for selection of this response. Candidates are permitted four hours to complete the test. The exam is administered at hundreds of test sites around the world during four testing windows each year. The cost is \$350. Each testing window is about two weeks long, allowing applicants to take the exam at a convenient time that does not interfere with work, family or religious schedules.

Who is eligible to become an RPSGT?

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).

In July 2008, eligibility requirements will change, but the new requirements only apply to 6-month and 18-month experiential applicants. An application and details can be found in the RPSGT Candidate Handbook, which can be downloaded free at www.brpt.org.

How do you prepare for the exam?

A general guideline is to allow at least six months to prepare, though it really depends on the academic and professional experience you have in the field. A good place to start is by carefully reviewing the Candidate Handbook, which can be downloaded free at www.brpt.org. The Handbook

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Respiratory therapists often discover that their experience and knowledge can give them an advantage in preparing for the RPSGT exam



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includes a list of Primary Reference Materials to study in preparing to take the exam. There is also a "study tips" section of the web site where successful RPSGTs share suggestions with applicants.

In addition, the BRPT publishes a RPSGT Study Guide, which helps applicants understand the types of questions and offers suggestions on how to best prepare for the exam. The cost of the Study Guide is \$29.95 and statistics show that those who order the Guide have a higher pass rate than those who do not.

General Advice on Studying

It's a good idea to set aside specific times in the day or week to study – and stick to that schedule. If possible, find someone to serve as your mentor or study partner or take the lead and form a study group. Pace yourself to complete most of your studying one month prior to taking the exam, and use the final month for general review. The examination content outline that appears in the Candidate Handbook is an excellent way to stay on course.

Many RPSGTs create flash cards for studying. Others report that a dedicated notebook helps with organization and makes it easy to keep study materials on hand to read during quiet moments. Be sure to add your name to BRPT's email list to receive timely updates, along with copies of the BRPT Insider newsletter.

The BRPT's recent Survey of RPSGTs and Sleep Technologists found that two out of three respondents felt the RPSGT exam is "difficult but fair," and more than 91% of those surveyed reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the RPSGT credential.

Career Boost

In any profession, it is commonly accepted that credentialed professionals 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 technologists and there is evidence that an increasing number of employers prefer to hire RPSGTs. For many, earning the credential translates into an immediate increase in salary. BRPT recently launched the RPSGT Career Center, an online interactive job board that is free to job seekers.

By excelling in their field, RPSGTs are indispensable to the diagnosis, treatment and after care of patients with sleep disorders. A registered sleep technologist 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.

Helen Sullivan is the Communications Director for the Board of Registered Polysomnographic Technologists. For more information about the RPSGT exam, visit www.brpt.org.

RPSGT Exam Dates for 2008

(application deadlines are about one month prior)

June 16-28

September 15-27

December 1-13