

What Does It Take to Become a “Certified” Sonographer?

When you have your next ultrasound examination, you may notice that the professional who performs it is wearing a blue-and-white “ARDMS” patch on his or her sleeve, or a framed ARDMS certificate is hanging on the wall. Why?

The patch and the certificate let you know that your sonographer has attained the high achievement of certification by the prestigious American Registry of Diagnostic Medical Sonographers, or “ARDMS.” Individuals with ARDMS certification may also be referred to as “certificants” or “registrants.” ARDMS has been certifying the sonographers who meet its standards for more than 27 years, and its credentials are widely recognized throughout the medical profession.

Eminent educators and clinicians in the ultrasound field work with the ARDMS to decide on the best policies and requirements for ARDMS certification—which may need to be adjusted occasionally to stay in step with the rapid pace of change in ultrasound technology.

Steps Sonographers Must Take to Achieve Certification

The first step in applying for ARDMS-certification is to complete enough education and clinical experience in performing ultrasound examinations on patients. Once the ARDMS has determined that an applicant meets its requirements in all areas, the applicant is officially designated as a “candidate,” and has 90 days to take at least one of the required examinations.

One exam that candidates must take covers the physical principles of ultrasound and the instrumentation that makes ultrasound equipment work. This material is technically complex, and it gets more sophisticated every year, as scientists discover new ways of using ultrasound to get better images of the various tissues and structures inside of the body.

The other required examination covers the specialty area in which the sonographer candidate practices—such as obstetrics/gynecology, neurosonology, or vascular technology (which is used to look within arteries and veins for conditions such as cholesterol-containing atherosclerotic plaques). In these specialty examinations, candidates must demonstrate specific clinical and ultrasound knowledge in specific areas.

The ARDMS examinations are taken on a computer, and many of the questions are based on actual ultrasound images. These examinations are very difficult, and many ultrasound professionals who take them are not able to pass them.

Once an applicant has passed at least two examinations—one on ultrasound physics and one on a clinical specialty area—he or she becomes an official ARDMS “registrant” or “certificant.”

But ARDMS requirements don't end there. All ARDMS certificants must pursue continuing medical education to keep up with the rapid advances in ultrasound and fine-tune their skills in patient care.

ARDMS Certification

ARDMS certification is a voluntary process, unlike licensure, and the specific requirements for certification are developed by experienced ultrasound professionals who have been expert practitioners in the ultrasound field for many years. ARDMS certification is a means of assuring professional competency for all patients. Certification standards are the same nationwide, while there may be minor—but important—differences in what's required for licensure from state to state.

So you can breathe easier when you see the ARDMS patch on your sonographer's sleeve. This professional has met the high standards of the ARDMS, and your sonogram will too.