

Continuing Education: Advancing the Profession or Frustrating the Professionals?

In the days of old, continuing education was a matter of choice for nuclear medicine professionals. Educational meetings were populated by a small but consistent group of individuals looking to share current techniques, network with colleagues, or gather information on the latest in the field. Today, continuing education has become an inherent part of the profession, as mandated by state and professional organizations that certify individuals or accredit facilities that perform imaging and therapeutic nuclear medicine and molecular procedures.

Although continuing education opportunities continue to expand, the criteria for awarding or receiving educational credit continues to cause confusion and frustration; therefore, an explanation of this confusing process may help sponsors and participants understand why the process has become so complicated.

WHO SETS THE STANDARDS FOR AWARDING EDUCATIONAL CREDIT?

Although most believe that the professional organizations such as SNM, the American Society of Radiologic Technologists (ASRT), the American Healthcare Radiology Administrators (AHRA), and others set the standards for awarding educational credits, the reality is that state and professional organizations *mandating* continuing education (CE) credit for license, certificate, or accreditation renewal—including the American Registry of Radiologic Technologists (ARRT), the Nuclear Medicine Technology Certification Board (NMTCB), the Intersocietal Commission for the Accreditation of Nuclear Medicine Laboratories (ICANL), and state regulatory agencies—



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set the standards with which we all must comply.

The written standards for educational credits for most states, as well as ICANL and the NMTCB, simply set a specific number of educational hours awarded by professional organizations such as the SNM, ASRT, AHRA and others. These organizations have demonstrated excellence in educational offerings and an appropriate mechanism for documenting participation in the learning experience. However, a few states, including California and Florida as well as the ARRT, mandate additional specifications for educational credits such as acquiring continuing education hours in a particular specialty/topic or defining strict guidelines for professional organizations awarding educational credits, sponsors offering educational programs, and registrants reporting acquired educational units.

Although state regulations may offer a small challenge for technologists living in those states, it is the ARRT guidelines that have challenged technologists, educational sponsors, and professional organizations attempting to offer or participate in educational programs.

A number of years ago, the ARRT developed a new requirement for its 270,000 plus registrants for certificate renewal. That requirement specified that each registrant acquire a specific number of educational hours during a defined two-year reporting cycle. Although initially that requirement did not sound difficult, the supporting guidelines challenged the profession as a whole in the following years. Not only did the ARRT define the number of educational credits required for certificate renewal, it also went one step further by developing guidelines for: 1) organizations recognized by the ARRT for awarding educational credits; 2) sponsors offering educational programs; and 3) registrants attending educational offerings.

WHO CAN OFFER EDUCATIONAL CREDITS?

Educational credits recognized by the ARRT are awarded by an organization called a “RCEEM” or a Recognized Continuing Education Evaluation Mechanism. To achieve RCEEM status, an organization must develop and document a program that meets criteria established by ARRT. The program must evaluate all aspects of the educational offering to assure that it meets the ARRT definition of continuing education. The SNMTS VOICE Guidelines were developed to achieve RCEEM status and provide educational sponsors with the necessary standards to meet the ARRT’s rigorous criteria for approval of educational programs.

WHY DOESN’T SNM SIMPLY DECLINE RCEEM STATUS?

The ARRT certifies a large percentage of the SNMTS membership. That number continues to grow as technologists sit for the CT exam in preparation for meeting state regulatory guidelines

Important Information for Educational Sponsors

The following list summarizes revised criteria based on published RCEEM guidelines to award continuing education hours (CEH) for submitted programs:

1. Lectures of 10–15 minutes will be grouped to total of a minimum of 30 minutes.
2. Lectures of 30 minutes will be awarded 0.5 CEH.
3. Lectures of 45–50 minutes will be awarded 0.75 CEH.
4. Lectures of 55–65 minutes will be awarded 1.0 CEH.
5. Laboratory hours are awarded ½ CEH credit:
 - Labs hours associated with a lecture series (minimum, 60 min): 60 minutes = 0.5 CEH. *Note:* labs less than 60 minutes will not be awarded CEH.
 - Labs not associated with a lecture series (minimum 120 minutes): 120 minutes = 1.0 CEH.
6. Lectures described as “45–50 minutes lecture, 10–15 minutes Q/A” will receive 0.75 CEH.
7. Lectures described as “45 minutes lecture, 15 minutes panel discussion” with appropriate learning objectives for the panel discussion will be awarded 1.0 CEH.
8. Lectures presented during meal functions awarded ½ credit (60 minutes = 0.5 CEH). *Note:* If the meal is *completely* served (e.g., a box lunch) prior to the beginning of the lecture and the sponsor *guarantees* that no interruptions will occur during the lecture, full credit will be awarded.
9. Lectures with inappropriately worded objectives will not be awarded CEH until corrected. *Note:* an appropriately worded objective will begin with an action verb that can measure the knowledge gained by the participant during the educational experience: “*List the number of . . . , Explain the . . . , Describe the . . . , Identify the . . .*” Verbs that cannot be measured, such as “*Understand*” will not be accepted and must be corrected prior to program approval.

If you have questions or need assistance in preparing your VOICE application, please contact Jannine Henderson at jhenderson@snm.org or Kathy Thomas at ksthenomas0412@msn.com.

to perform PET/CT. If SNM declines or does not meet RCEEM status, the approved educational offerings would not be recognized by the ARRT, thus, technologists would be forced to seek alternate educational sponsors with RCEEM status to obtain necessary educational credits for certificate renewal.

HOW DOES SNMTS MEET THE ARRT DEFINITION OF CONTINUING EDUCATION?

To achieve RCEEM status, SNMTS developed the Verification of Involvement in Continuing Education (VOICE) Guidelines. VOICE guidelines define the components necessary for educational sponsors to acquire continuing education credits that meet ARRT guidelines. A brief outline of those guidelines follows; however, members and educational sponsors are encouraged to review the full document

found on the SNM Web site (at http://interactive.snm.org/docs/2007_VOICE_Guidelines.pdf), which includes:

- Objectives of the guidelines.
- Description of the VOICE program.
- Continuing education activities eligible for credit:
 - Lecture/labs (live programs);
 - Self-study programs (audiotape, videotape/DVD, CD-ROMs and Web programs);
 - Journal articles;
 - Authors and coauthors of continuing education articles in peer-reviewed journals; speakers at meetings approved for VOICE credit; authors and coauthors of book chapters, textbooks or reference books;
 - Scientific papers; and
 - Student presentations.
- Activities not eligible for educational credit:

- Routine department or staff meetings;
- Poster sessions and viewing exhibits;
- Elected office or committee meetings;
- Basic nuclear medicine courses taken during initial nuclear medicine technology training;
- Attendance at bowl competitions;
- Question and answer sessions;
- Informal case discussions/presentations; and
- Commercial company on-site, hands-on equipment training (applications training) or review of equipment operations handbook (operators' manual).
- Transcripts of CE activities.
- Fee structure:
 - Members/nonmembers participating in program; and
 - Sponsors requesting CE credit for educational programs.

- Delineation of responsibilities for educational sponsors:
 - Responsibilities of sponsoring organizations or applicants;
 - Responsibilities of VOICE activity participant and SNMTS members attending CE courses approved by other RCEEMs; and
 - Responsibilities of SNMTS Education Department.

The ARRT's "delineation of responsibilities." as interpreted by the SNMTS in the VOICE Guidelines, was the specific section that was responsible for the organizational chaos and frustration during educational programs. Following further review of that section, including discussions with the ARRT, the VOICE guidelines have been modified to incorporate more reasonable recommendations for sponsors and participants.

WHAT WAS REVISED/CLARIFIED IN THE VOICE GUIDELINES?

The revised VOICE guidelines, approved at the SNM Annual Meeting, remove much of the frustration from the educational experience. As described in the July/August edition of *Uptake*, the

SNMTS newsletter, the revised guidelines for attendance verification require that the sponsor only check participants out if they leave early. Additionally, the VOICE form has been simplified. The check in/out columns have been removed. The sponsor will verify, by signature on the participant's VOICE form, that the individual attended 80% of the program, and then submit the signed document to the SNM office. Self-reporting continues to be disallowed by the ARRT guidelines; however, by removing the "kindergarten environment," participants should be comfortable with that aspect of the reporting process.

Thanks to the hard work of the SNM staff, the VOICE application form has been streamlined and placed on the Web. Sponsors will no longer need to submit hard copy of the VOICE application; thus, expediting and improving the approval process.

A summary page that highlights the changes for awarding CE credit has been developed (see box) and is being distributed to past, current, and future educational sponsors to assist them in planning educational programs.

Clarification of educational credits available to authors, coauthors, and students, may encourage more technologists to share their experiences and expertise by writing continuing education articles or participating in educational offerings as speakers at local, regional, or national meetings.

Although the VOICE guidelines have been revised in many areas, RCEEM guidelines continue to restrict SNMTS from returning to the days of old; however, it is anticipated that the current changes will enhance the educational experience in a very positive way and with the help and support of the membership and educational sponsors, that experience will continue to improve.

If you have any comments, concerns or questions, please contact Jannine Henderson, senior manager of Continuing Education, SNM, at jhenderson@snm.org or me at kstthomas0412@msn.com.

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