

Standards of Practice



1. Purpose

The Australasian Sonographers Association (ASA) is the peak body and leading voice for sonographers. The ASA is guiding the advancement of our profession to ensure the community has access to quality sonographic services. The ASA promotes and advocates for best practice in medical sonography through the provision of standards and appropriate benchmarks.

These Standards of Practice (Standards) are to be read in conjunction with the ASA Code of Conduct for Sonographers (Code), and the two documents together set the standards expected of sonographers who work in diagnostic practice or who undertake research.

The standards set out in this document are intended to complement information and guidance issued by other organisations, such as employers and statutory authorities. At all times, sonographers must comply with any applicable laws governing the practice of sonography, such as statutory codes of conduct applicable to sonographers.

In general, a sonographer who is in breach of their legal responsibilities, including being in breach of any statutory code of conduct, will also be in breach of the ASA Code and Standards.

2. Scope

This document applies to ASA members working in diagnostic practice or who undertake research. It is a requirement of membership that ASA members comply with these Standards. ASA members who fail to comply with these Standards may face disciplinary action in accordance with the ASA's governing documents.

In addition, sonographers must adhere to the Code, rules for continuing professional development and other applicable guidelines. Relevant documents can be found on the ASA website.

For example, if a sonographer's practice is called into question through a complaint or other notification, that sonographer's conduct will be assessed against the Standards contained in this document, the Code and other applicable guidelines or statutory codes of conduct.

3. Definitions

The ASA recognises that our members work in a range of different settings that include clinical practice, management, education, research and roles in industry.

For clarity, standardised terms are used throughout, with common synonyms listed below. In the interpretation of these Standards, the given term and the synonyms can be read interchangeably.

ASA – Australasian Sonographers Association (Ltd)

ASAR – Australian Sonographer Accreditation Registry

Code – The ASA Code of Conduct for Sonographers

Competency – the ability to do something successfully or efficiently

Colleague – co-worker; immediate supervisor; student; immediate subordinate; member of the health care team

Duty of care – a legal obligation to consider the safety or wellbeing of others and to undertake clinical practice in sonography at a standard that would be reasonably expected of a person engaging in that clinical practice

Examination – interaction between sonographer and patient; procedure; scan; diagnostic examination

Expertise – expert skill or knowledge

Good practice or care – a standard of performance and conduct that meets the requirement of these Standards

Informed consent – permission provided by a patient who understands the nature, reason and scope of an examination and who has been given sufficient information to make an informed decision about whether to have an examination or not

May – an optional requirement; a good practice or policy

Must – a mandatory requirement; essential; an absolute requirement

NZMRTB – New Zealand Medical Radiation Technologists Board

Patient – consumers of health care services

Practice – any role, whether remunerated or not, in which the individual uses their skills and knowledge as a sonographer. For the purposes of these Standards, practice is not restricted to the provision of direct clinical care. It also includes using professional knowledge in a direct nonclinical relationship with patients, working in management, administration, research or education

Professionalism – the attributes, skills and behaviour expected of a professional

Proficiency – a cluster of related abilities, commitments, knowledge and skills that enable a person (or an organisation) to meet the required standard of good practice

Should – strongly advised; a firm guideline; best practice to be adhered to, unless there is evidence available to show the value of another course

Sonographer – a person holding qualifications satisfactory for accreditation with the ASAR or the NZMRTB

Sonography (Ultrasound) – for the context of this document, is the conduct of a structured, documented, anatomical and/or functional study using diagnostic ultrasound equipment for the purpose of medical diagnosis

Sonologist (Radiologist) – for the context of this document, is a medical specialist who performs specialist diagnostic ultrasound examinations. The sonologist must hold a specialist ultrasound qualification, such as Fellowship of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists in Radiodiagnosis, a Diploma of Diagnostic Ultrasound, Certificate of Obstetric and Gynaecological Ultrasound or equivalent specialist training (e.g. cardiologist).

Standards – the ASA Standards of Practice

4. Scope of practice

The ASA recognises that a sonographer's scope of practice will change over time and that the practice of experienced sonographers often becomes more focused and specialised than that of newly accredited colleagues.

Specialisation in a certain area, or with a particular client group, or a movement into roles in management, education or research may change your scope of practice. Every time sonographers are asked to renew their membership, they will be asked to sign a declaration that they continue to meet the Standards that apply to their scope of practice.

Sonographers must not engage in clinical practice of a type that is outside his or her experience or training, or provide services that he or she is not qualified to provide, unless appropriately supervised.

All sonographers have a professional and legal responsibility to ensure that they are appropriately trained and qualified to work within a particular scope of practice. Sonographers must ensure they seek appropriate training and experience where their knowledge may be deficient in a particular area of their practice. This obligation includes a requirement that sonographers consider any loss in skill and knowledge if they have been out of clinical practice for an extended period or have not worked within a particular clinical field for an extended period.

5. Meeting the Standards

Sonographers must meet these Standards and practise lawfully, safely and effectively.

These Standards provide a framework on which proficiency and professionalism can be assessed, while ensuring that the best interests of the public and the wider profession are safeguarded.

As professionals, sonographers must make informed, reasoned decisions about their practice to ensure they comply with these Standards. This includes seeking advice and support from the ASA, education providers, employers, colleagues, unions and others to ensure that the wellbeing of the public is safeguarded at all times.

These Standards provide a framework for professional conduct that aims to minimise risk to the sonographer, patients, and improve the overall standard of the sonography profession.

6. These Standards may change in the future

The ASA has produced these Standards after consultation with a broad cross section of stakeholders, including consumer groups, professional societies and government.

The ASA will continue to listen to our stakeholders and will keep our Standards under review. The ASA may amend these Standards and expects all members to be familiar with the Standards as amended from time to time.

The ASA will always publicise any changes to these Standards and any related documents or guidelines, for example, by publishing notices on the ASA website and informing other professional bodies.

7. Standards of Practice

7.1 Accreditation

- 7.1.1 ASA sonographer members within Australia must adhere to these Standards and be accredited with the ASAR.
- 7.1.2 ASA sonographer members within New Zealand must adhere to these Standards and be registered with the NZMRTB.
- 7.1.3 ASA sonographer members in other parts of the world must adhere to these Standards and be accredited with the appropriate regulatory authority (if such an authority exists).

7.2 Scope of practice

Sonographers must:

- 7.2.1 not practise in an area of sonography that is outside his or her experience or training, or provide services that he or she is not qualified to provide
- 7.2.2 manage their own workload and resources effectively for the efficient examination of the patient
- 7.2.3 refer to other sonographers for examinations that are outside their personal scope of practice
- 7.2.4 understand the role of the sonographer in the promotion of health and health screening for disease detection.

7.3 Legal and ethical boundaries

Sonographers must:

- 7.3.1 be aware of the ethical and legal boundaries and responsibilities of their profession, and practise within the legislative framework of their country, state or territory
- 7.3.2 comply with any local laws governing the practice of sonography, including any statutory codes of conduct applicable to sonographers
- 7.3.3 recognise that relationships with patients should be based on mutual respect and trust and maintain high standards of care even in situations of personal incompatibility
- 7.3.4 be fully familiar with the principles of informed consent
- 7.3.5 be fully familiar with the principles of duty of care
- 7.3.6 be fully familiar with applicable ethical principles and any laws or research guidelines governing the proposed research when involved in research
- 7.3.7 be familiar with the policies, procedures and protocols of their workplace and adhere to these documents
- 7.3.8 on legitimate request, or as required by law, obtain any police checks, working with children check or any other check of the sonographer's criminal background that may be required to conduct examinations on particular patients
- 7.3.9 comply with any direction, order or practice restriction imposed on them by a court, tribunal, registration board or any other body or person having legal authority over the sonographer's practice, including the ASA.

7.4 Fitness to practise

- 7.4.1 Sonographers must not engage in sonography practice or provide care to patients while under the influence of alcohol or unlawful drugs.
- 7.4.2 Sonographers must take all reasonable steps to not knowingly allow a colleague to undertake examinations when that person is known to be under the influence of alcohol or unlawful drugs.
- 7.4.3 Sonographers who are taking prescribed medication must obtain advice from the prescribing health practitioner or dispensing pharmacist on the impact of the medication on his or her ability to practise and must refrain from providing patients with care or sonography services in circumstances where his or her capacity is or may be impaired.
- 7.4.4 Sonographers must not knowingly provide services or care to patients while suffering from a physical or mental impairment, disability, condition or disorder (including an addiction to alcohol or a drug, whether or not prescribed) that places or is likely to place patients at risk of harm.
- 7.4.5 Sonographers must be aware of the importance of the maintenance of their own good health.

7.5 Professional conduct

- 7.5.1 Sonographers must meet the standards of behaviour and conduct set out in the Code and any statutory code of conduct applicable to sonographers.

7.6 Cultural diversity

- 7.6.1 Sonographers should understand the requirement to adapt practice to meet the needs of different cultural groups or individuals.

7.7 Communication

Sonographers should:

- 7.7.1 demonstrate effective and appropriate verbal and nonverbal skills in communicating information, advice, instructions and professional opinion to patients, colleagues and others
- 7.7.2 at a minimum, be able to demonstrate English language skills at the International English Language Testing System academic level 7 or equivalent
- 7.7.3 understand how communication skills affect assessment and engagement of patients and how the means of communication should be modified to address and take account of factors such as age, gender, capacity, learning ability and physical ability
- 7.7.4 be aware of the characteristics and consequences of verbal and nonverbal communication and how this can be affected by factors such as age, culture, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status and spiritual or religious beliefs
- 7.7.5 understand the need to provide patients or people acting on their behalf with the information necessary to enable them to make informed decisions.

7.8 Documentation

- 7.8.1 Sonographers must be able to keep accurate, comprehensive and comprehensible records, including images of their examinations in accordance with applicable legislation, policies, protocols and guidelines.

7.9 Ongoing education

Sonographers must:

- 7.9.1 understand the structure and function of the human body, together with knowledge of health, disease, disorder and dysfunction relevant to sonography within their scope of practice
- 7.9.2 know the physical and scientific principles of the ultrasound equipment currently in use and understand the capability, applications and range of technological equipment used in sonography.

Sonographers should:

- 7.9.3** be able to engage in evidence-based practice, evaluate practice systematically and participate in clinical and other audit procedures
- 7.9.4** be aware of the principles and applications of scientific enquiry, including the evaluation of treatment efficacy and the research process
- 7.9.5** understand the theoretical basis of patient assessment prior to and during ultrasound examinations
- 7.9.6** be aware of the current developments and trends in the science and practice of sonography
- 7.9.7** be trained, and maintain current competency in first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and preferably, basic life support.

7.10 Infection control

Sonographers must:

- 7.10.1** be aware of their responsibilities in infection control. These responsibilities can be stated in the form of company, practice, hospital or ASA guidelines or standards applicable to accreditation of diagnostic imaging practices
- 7.10.2** follow accepted best practice to minimise the risk of cross infection between patients.

Sonographers should:

- 7.10.3** use any provided personal protective equipment to meet infection control standards. This includes protection of the sonographer from contamination or infection
- 7.10.4** take all reasonable steps to ensure infection control standards within the workplace comply with acceptable standards.

7.11 Quality control and quality assurance

Sonographers should:

- 7.11.1** be aware of the role of audit and review in quality management, including quality control, quality assurance and the use of appropriate outcome measures and be able to maintain an effective audit trail and work towards continual improvement
- 7.11.2** participate in quality assurance programs, where appropriate
- 7.11.3** check that equipment is functioning properly and within the specifications and take appropriate action in the case of faulty functioning and operation.

7.12 The diagnostic process

Sonographers must:

- 7.12.1** prior to commencing the examination, meet the appropriate standards for ensuring the correct patient identification, correct side of examination and the correct type of examination
- 7.12.2** understand the structure and function of the human body in health, disease and trauma, as well as common pathologies and mechanisms of disease and trauma appropriate to their scope of practice
- 7.12.3** understand the signs and symptoms of disease and trauma that result in referral for ultrasound procedures.

Sonographers may:

- 7.12.4** undertake and record a relevant, sensitive and detailed clinical history and assessment.

Sonographers should:

- 7.12.5** use physical, graphical, verbal and electronic methods to collect and analyse information from a range of sources, including a patient's clinical history, diagnostic images and reports, pathological tests and results.

Sonographers must:

7.12.6 be able to use the information they have collected to plan an appropriate diagnostic imaging examination.

Sonographers should:

7.12.7 manage complex and unpredictable situations, including the ability to adapt planned diagnostic imaging examinations or interventions

7.12.8 demonstrate a logical and systematic approach to problem solving

7.12.9 change their practice as needed to take account of new developments, technologies and changing contexts

7.12.10 critically appraise, research and use reasoning and problem-solving skills to determine appropriate actions

7.12.11 be aware of a range of research methodologies

7.12.12 recognise the value of research to the critical evaluation of practice.

Sonographers must:

7.12.13 operate diagnostic imaging equipment safely and accurately

7.12.14 use information and communication technologies appropriate to their practice.

Sonographers should:

7.12.15 perform a wide range of ultrasound imaging techniques appropriate to their workplace and within their scope of practice

7.12.16 identify disease and trauma processes as they manifest on ultrasound images

7.12.17 be able to review diagnostic findings on other imaging modalities.

Sonographers must:

7.12.18 be familiar with the general risk profiles of pharmaceuticals, environmental agents and imaging products that are used in ultrasound, in both diagnostic and therapeutic procedures if within scope of practice

7.12.19 be mindful that ultrasound is an important diagnostic tool and that the use of diagnostic ultrasound may give rise to adverse findings, even where a scan is conducted for education or practical experience

7.12.20 ensure that any person they scan understands that abnormalities may be detected and that suitable processes are followed to ensure any detected abnormalities are appropriately managed. Examinations conducted for diagnostic purposes should always be conducted on referral from a suitably qualified practitioner or otherwise be conducted by a sonographer for or on behalf of a suitably qualified practitioner.

Sonographers should:

7.12.21 refrain from scanning close friends and family for diagnostic purposes unless there is no alternative. If an alternative exists, the sonographer must make or assist in making those arrangements.

7.13 Reporting technique and protocol

Sonographers must:

7.13.1 document ultrasound examination findings indicating whether normal appearances or pathology have been detected according to workplace policies and protocols. If abnormalities are detected, the ultrasound characteristics, location and extent of the pathology should be recorded. The sonographers must record any diagnostic limitations in the examination

7.13.2 state their sonographer status and report the findings of the ultrasound examination when communicating findings directly to a referring practitioner. If a student sonographer is asked to give a report, he or she must defer to his or her supervisor at all times. Sonographers must follow the workplace policies and protocols in relation to communicating findings and reporting to referring medical practitioners

7.13.3 ensure that where the sonographer relays findings to a referring practitioner, information is clearly and accurately communicated and inform the referring practitioner that these findings are provisional and the referrer is made aware that the report may be amended when the study is reported by the sonologist

- 7.13.4** ensure that if the referring practitioner gives the sonographer instructions to pass on to the patient, that the instructions are clearly and accurately relayed to the patient. Consideration should always be given to allowing the patient to speak directly with the referring practitioner (e.g. by telephone). The sonographer should take all reasonable steps to ensure that the patient follows instructions, for example, ensuring the patient is transferred to an emergency department
- 7.13.5** ensure, if engaged in circumstances where it is necessary for examination reports to be made directly to the patient, clearly detail in the workplace policies and protocols this requirement and appropriate guidance
- 7.13.6** follow workplace policies and protocols when reporting findings to a patient
- 7.13.7** in all circumstances where a sonographer is required, or the sonographer considers it necessary or advantageous to provide results directly to a patient, consider whether:
- a) it is appropriate that the information be given by the sonographer or whether the information should be given by a medical practitioner who can provide advice and assistance to the patient
 - b) the patient is able to comprehend the information, particularly if the findings are serious
 - c) the results need to be explained to the patient in a manner that is beyond the sonographer's skill and expertise
 - d) the patient, on being given the results by the sonographer, may decide that follow-up with the referring practitioner is not required
 - e) there should be consultation with the reporting practitioner and sonographer to ensure the reporting practitioner agrees with the sonographer's diagnosis
 - f) there are any local procedures or expectations (for example, the expectations of a referrer) that would prohibit the sonographer informing the patient of a diagnosis or findings
 - g) it is more appropriate that the sonographer gives the results directly to the referring practitioner, particularly if there is a need for the patient to seek medical attention or advice.

Date of issue: Effective from July 2014.

Date of review: These Standards will be reviewed at three years from date of issue or from time to time as required.

Last reviewed: October 2014.