

Frequently Asked Questions about Diagnostic Medical Sonography

Q: Where do sonographers work?

A: Sonographers are employed by hospital, imaging centers and private physician offices.

New graduates will be employed primarily in the hospital setting.

Q: What are the duties of a sonographer?

A: Diagnostic medical sonographers use critical thinking skills to perform diagnostic imaging examinations and prepare preliminary reports according to established procedures under the supervision of a licensed physician. Sonographers are credentialed health care professionals who have completed program requirements and have passed national examinations.

The general sonographer is able to perform the following:

- Obtain, review, and integrate pertinent patient history and supporting clinical data to facilitate optimum diagnostic results;
- Perform appropriate procedures and record anatomic, pathologic, and/or physiologic data for interpretation by a physician;
- Record, analyze, and process diagnostic data and other pertinent observations made during the procedure for presentation to the interpreting physician;
- Exercise discretion and judgment in the performance of sonographic and/or other diagnostic services;
- Demonstrate appropriate communication skills with patients and colleagues;
- Act in a professional and ethical manner;
- Provide patient education related to medical ultrasound and/or other diagnostic vascular techniques, and promote principles of good health

Q: What is a typical day in the life of a sonographer?

A: A sonographer usually works an eight-hour shift and during *that* time completes 10-12 or more ultrasound scans along with required paperwork and documentation. This involves interaction with patients, physicians and other health care professionals. The sonographer provides quality patient care. Ultrasound cases are often “added on” to the schedule each day, and then sonographers will be required to work additional hours. Schedule changes play a role in the stressful demands of the career.

Q: Part of the sonography career includes being “on call”. What does that mean?

A: Depending upon the facility, sonographers will be required to be called back in to the department after hours, weekends, and holidays. For example if your shift is over at 4:30 pm, you could drive home and be called back to the hospital at 9 pm, return home to sleep and be called again at 3 am to return to the hospital and then you are still required to be at work at 8 am.

Q: What role do sonographers play in patient care?

A: Sonographers are patient focused and provide care to all patients: **biopsy, emergent, intensive care, obstetrical, trauma etc.** The sonographer will deal with patient issues such as vomiting, bleeding, use of the bed pan etc.

Q: Do sonographers deal with needles, blood, and/or bodily fluids?

A: Yes, sonographers are patient caregivers and indeed deal with all these items and also **go to the ER, ICU, NICU and OR to perform ultrasound imaging.**

Q: Sonographers image babies all day, right?

A: Actually sonographers image many parts of the body - organs of the abdomen: liver, kidneys, pancreas, spleen, gallbladder; organs of the pelvis: uterus, ovaries, prostate; glandular organs: breast, thyroid, testicles. Also the vascular system is imaged by sonographers. Procedures such as transvaginal imaging are a major part of the imaging day. Sonographers **assist with biopsies and other invasive procedures including cases in the operating room.**

Q: When I had my ultrasound the sonographer sat and moved the wand around? Is the job physically demanding?

A: Yes, you are on your feet most of the day. You need to be able to help transfer patients from wheelchairs to stretchers, move ultrasound equipment to other hospital areas, and assist as needed in the hospital.

Q: Is the career stressful?

A: Sonographers are challenged each day to acquire diagnostic images, write accurate impressions and deal with the emotional stress of illness and critical diseases. **Emotional stress** often involves fetal abnormalities including fetal death.

Q: How competitive is the HACC DMS program?

A: We typically have 20-40 applicants for the 10-12 positions, so it is very competitive. Check out the [Admitted Students Profile](#) at www.hacc.edu under Health Careers (Admission Criteria). This is why it's important to work closely with your DMS advisor to ensure you are following all DMS application requirements.

Q: Can the DMS program be completed part time?

A: No, a full time commitment is required. Students have not been successful if they attempted to work more than 12-16 hours a week. Most students find that they are not able to work at all while they are taking the DMS courses.

Q: What kind of time investment does this program involve?

A: The DMS program requires a considerable amount of time. It is estimated that 2 hours of studying and test preparation is required for every hour of instruction. The courses require completion of assignments and projects in addition to the studying. Students are obligated to about 40 hours per week from the combination of lecture, lab, open lab and clinical rotations.

Q: What are some of the challenges of this program?

A: At the end of each semester, students are required to successfully complete multiple comprehensive final examinations which range from 50-200 questions. The grading for the DMS program is set as: A (93-100), B (85-92) and C (77-84). All DMS courses must be completed with a C or higher grade to continue in the program and graduate.

Q: Where would I do my clinical rotations?

A: Faculty assigns you to an imaging facility for specific learning outcomes; students do not get to choose locations. Students change clinical sites each semester. **Sites can be as far as 80 miles from Harrisburg.** (As you plan your finances for the program, please keep in mind the cost of gas and auto expenses as you are required to drive to the sites for your clinical rotation.)

Q: Is there a national or state certification or credentialing examination that is required in order to be employed?

A: Yes, you are required to pass three American Registry for Diagnostic Medical Sonography® ([ARDMS](#)) credentialing exams. Sonography Principles and Instrumentation, Abdomen, and Obstetrics and Gynecology. Exam costs total \$725.00 and are not included in the program cost (it is an out of pocket expense). Check out the ARDMS web site www.ardms.org.

Q: Is the DMS program at HACC accredited?

A: Yes, HACC's Diagnostic Medical Sonography (DMS) program is accredited by the [Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs \(CAAHEP\)](#), 1361 Park Street, Clearwater, FL 33756, Phone: 727-210-2350, Fax: 727- 210-2354. www.caahep.org. CAAHEP accredits programs upon the recommendation of the Joint Review Committee on Education in Diagnostic Medical Sonography (JRC-DMS) , 6021 University Boulevard, Suite 500, Ellicott City, MD 21043; Phone: (443) 973-3251; Fax: (866) 738-3444; Email and web site: mail@jrcdms.org; www.jrcdms.org/

Q: What is the job market like?

A: Nationally there is a demand for DMS professionals. The job market in central Pennsylvania may be limited due to the number of graduates in the area. However, HACC graduates have been successful in finding employment:

| Graduation Year | ARDMS Exam Pass Rate (Within program --prior to graduation) | | | Job Placement Rate (When seeking employment within 12 months of graduation) | Program Completion Rate (# graduates in cohort / # students initially in cohort) |
|-----------------------|--|-------------|-------------|--|---|
| | SPI (Physics & Instrumentation) | Abdomen | OB/GYN | | |
| 2019 | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 58% |
| 2018 | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 83 % |
| 2017 | 100% | 100% | 100% | 92% | 100% |
| 2016 | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| 2015 | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 75% |
| 5 Year Average | 100% | 100% | 100% | 98% | 83% |

Q: What is the starting salary for new graduates in our area?

A: Starting salary in south central Pennsylvania ranges from \$24.00-\$27.00 an hour for a part time or full time position and a \$28.00-\$29.00 for a PRN or flex position.

Student Name: _____ **Student Signature:** _____